

THE BRITISH EXPERIENCE IN IRAQ, 2007: A PERSPECTIVE ON THE UTILITY OF FORCE.

**A Monograph
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Abstract

THE BRITISH EXPERIENCE IN IRAQ, 2007: A PERSPECTIVE ON THE UTILITY OF FORCE. By Colonel Ian N. A. Thomas OBE, UK Army, 63pages.

Recent years have seen the US, UK and other ISAF and Coalition nations enmeshed in protracted, complex and intense campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. Resilient and highly adaptable opponents have operated asymmetrically, and amongst the people, to negate the technological superiority of the West; counterinsurgency (COIN) has been the norm. Progress made has been hard won, consuming considerable resources and testing national will. Despite the achievement of often rapid and spectacular tactical military successes, the desired political dividends have been slower to materialise and scarcely commensurate with the investment of national blood and treasure. This has led some to question the utility of military force and the mood in several Western capitals seems increasingly wary of further stabilisation campaigns abroad. This sense of caution is reinforced by the global economic downturn and its associated fiscal challenges, which have encouraged retrenchment in public spending, especially in defence budgets. It would seem timely, given this context, to reflect upon the utility of force.

Following Clausewitz's reasoning, the utility of force rests on its instrumentality in achieving a desired policy goal. This monograph contends that this involves controlling, to a sufficient degree, the adversary's policy choices, which depends on changing attitudes, and thence behaviour, in a way favourable to our interests. It requires our opponents to embrace our vision of their political future: they must be convinced to accept this changed political order. The political value of armed force derives from its power to hurt (its capacity for "killing people and breaking things"); its utility is a function of how effectively this can be harnessed to influence behavior and achieve control. The ultimate expression of hard power, armed force can be used to deter, coerce or compel especially in an interstate conflict when these effects are focused on an enemy government in control of its people. In a confrontation with an enemy operating amongst the people, such as in stabilisation or COIN campaigns, where control of the people is contested and political considerations predominate, the power to hurt is diffused and attenuated, being consciously restrained by policy choices and by legal and moral norms. A greater premium is placed on persuasion over coercion. Here, activities designed to enhance legitimacy and win consent (for shorthand termed stabilisation) are likely to be more effective, with the military in a subordinate role. By promoting physical security, it can create the opportunity for other instruments of power to resolve political problems; but armed force alone may resolve little.

This monograph examines the purpose and dominant characteristics of military force and highlights the conditions that must obtain if military success is to be translated into political advantage in the contemporary operating environment. It uses recent British experience in Iraq to illustrate some of the challenges involved. It concludes that despite the complexity and frustrations of Iraq and Afghanistan, armed force retains utility in the contemporary operational environment, as long as certain conditions are met. These are that the missions allocated to the military are appropriate, recognising the limitations of force; are adequately resourced; are properly integrated with other instruments of national power; and are underwritten with the requisite political commitment to sustain them over time.

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Introduction

In March 2007, troops from Multinational Division (South East) (MND(SE)) under British command conducted a successful raid against leadership elements of Basra Jaysh al Mehdi (JAM)¹, disrupting them momentarily. At the time the word was that JAM nefariously derived income from electricity generation in Basra and the minority governing Fadillah Party skimmed money from the oil industry. This corruption appeared to be tolerated by the Iraqi political establishment. The fact that Mr. Wahili, Basra's governor, headed the Fadillah Party and was alleged to profit heavily from the oil industry, compounded the issue. Following the strike on JAM, Fadillah made an opportunist bid to exploit JAM's temporary disarray to muscle in on the electricity franchise. This provoked a violent backlash from JAM whose fighters besieged Wahili's residence, attacking it with rocket-propelled grenades and automatic weapons. Wahili called for MND(SE) assistance - a request it was obliged to honor not least because it came from the duly elected Governor of Basra. An armoured battlegroup deployed to keep order and maintain the "dignity" of the Governor's office. In meetings with community leaders subsequently, it was learnt that the JAM leadership was incensed at Governor Wahili's opportunism. The sentiment was that he was being greedy: he should have been satisfied with his income exacted from the oil industry and should not have had the temerity to try to get in on the electricity action as well².

Context

The Basra vignette illustrates the Byzantine complexity of the political context within which Western forces have sometimes had to operate. More widely, recent years have seen the

¹ The militia loyal to the Shiite cleric, Moqtadr al Sadr.

² The Basra vignette is drawn from the author's personal experience as Chief of Staff of the British-led HQ MND(SE) in Basra in 2007.

US, UK and other ISAF and Coalition nations enmeshed in protracted, complex and intense campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. Resilient and highly adaptable opponents have operated asymmetrically, and amongst the people, to negate the technological superiority of the West; counterinsurgency (COIN) has been the norm. Progress made has been hard won and costly, consuming considerable resources and testing national will. Despite the achievement of often rapid and spectacular tactical military successes, the desired political dividends have been slower to materialise and seemingly have not been commensurate with the investment of national blood and treasure.

There is a palpable sense of war weariness in certain Western capitals, where the mood seems increasingly wary of further direct intervention abroad.³ Furthermore, the global economic downturn and its associated fiscal challenges have encouraged retrenchment in public spending, putting particular pressure on defence budgets. Additionally, the recent NATO campaign in Libya, dominated by air operations, seems not only to have successfully achieved its political objectives, but also to have done so in a conspicuously cost effective way, when compared against the benchmark of operations in Afghanistan.⁴ Importantly, it was done within a timeframe politically tolerable for Western domestic electorates. Indeed, some see Libya as an exemplar for future intervention operations.⁵ This, and the seductive allure of ongoing US “drone

³ Katherine Brown, “After 10 years the public is weary of Afghan War: the Ticker,” *Bloomberg News*, 7 October 2011. <http://mobile.bloomberg.com/news/2011-10-07/after-10-years-public-is-weary-of-afghan-war-the-ticker> (Accessed 9 Feb 12). Anna Fifield, “War-weary US shifts focus to home front,” *Financial Times*, 24 June 2011. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/f00c3878-9e81-11e0-9469-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1lvgykSQ> (Accessed 9 Feb 12).

⁴ Saqeb Mueen and Grant Turnbull, eds. “Accidental Heroes: Britain, France and the Libya Campaign,” *Interim RUSI Campaign Report*, September 2011.

⁵ Ivo H Daalder (US Ambassador to NATO) and Admiral James G Stavridis (Commander US European Command), “NATO’s Victory in Libya: The Right Way to Run an Intervention,” *Foreign*

strikes” (more properly known as remotely-piloted aircraft (RPA) strikes) in Yemen and Pakistan, may encourage political decision makers to favour such limited footprint methods of military intervention and may reinforce the growing aversion to further large-scale stability operations.⁶ NATO expects to reduce significantly the scope of its operations in Afghanistan and draw down its deployed force levels by December 2014, creating the attractive political proposition, in the present resource-straitened times, of a *peace dividend*.⁷ However, the global security landscape remains challenging.⁸ Accordingly, many nations, including the US and UK, are looking to rebalance their force structures and capabilities.⁹

Outline

It would seem timely, given this context, to reflect upon the utility of force. A monograph of this length can do nothing more than skim the surface of the complex issues involved and it can be merely the starting point for wider studies. Many commentators have already examined the issues more expertly and in greater depth; this paper makes no pretensions in this respect. It is inspired by the experience of a particular phase in the British campaign in Basra, Operation ZENITH in 2006/07. This is an admittedly narrow aperture. However, useful observations can be extrapolated. The paper will first examine the purpose of military force. It will then address the

Affairs, Website Publication 26 February 2012. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/137073/ivo-h-daalder-and-james-g-stavridis/natos-victory-in-libya> (Accessed 26 Feb 2012).

⁶ Concerns exist, however, about the legal, moral and ethical implications of RPA campaigns. For one example of the ongoing debate, see Peter W. Stringer, “Do Drones Undermine Democracy?” *New York Times*, 21st January 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/22/opinion/sunday/do-drones-undermine-democracy.html?pagewanted=all> (Accessed 6 March 2012.)

⁷ As agreed at the NATO Heads of State and Government Summit in Lisbon in November 2010.

⁸ UK MOD Strategic Trends Programme, *Future Character of Conflict*, (HMSO, 2010).

⁹ US Defense Budget Priorities and Choices, January 2012. Secretary of Defense Leon E Panetta Statement on Fiscal 2013 Budget, Pentagon Press Briefing Room, Thursday January 26 2012. UK National Security Strategy (HMSO, Cm 7953 dated October 2010) and UK Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) (HMSO, Cm 7948 dated October 2010).

dominant characteristics of military force; conflict termination and conflict resolution; the conditions that must obtain if war is to be “decisive” in realising a political objective; the importance of legitimacy; and the role of stabilisation activity in enhancing legitimacy. It will consider the twin challenges of transition and transformation; and reconciliation and reintegration, which are central to the conversion of military success into political effect in COIN/stabilisation operations. It will review aspects of Operation ZENITH to illustrate the challenges of the application of force in a complex political environment. Finally, it will conclude that, despite the challenges and frustrations of Iraq and Afghanistan, armed force retains utility in the contemporary operational environment, as long as certain conditions are met. These are that the missions allocated to the military are appropriate, recognising the limitations of force; are adequately resourced; are properly integrated with other instruments of national power; and are underwritten with the requisite political commitment to sustain them over time.

The Purpose of Force

In his magisterial study, *On War*, Clausewitz sees war as a dialectic struggle of opposing independent wills, each trying to impose itself on the other. War is an adversarial contest where each uses force to disarm the opponent, rendering him vulnerable to the imposition of the other’s will.¹⁰ The utility of force rests on its instrumentality in achieving a desired policy goal.¹¹ This could lie anywhere on a scale of policy ambition between the extremely modest and limited at

¹⁰ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds. and trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), Page 75. “War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale. Countless duels go to make up war, but a picture of it as a whole can be formed by imagining a pair of wrestlers. Each tries through physical force to compel the other to do his will; his immediate aim is to throw the opponent in order to make him incapable of further resistance. War is thus an act of force to compel the enemy to do our will.... Force - that is physical force...- is thus the means of war; to impose our will on the enemy is its object.”

¹¹ Ibid., 77. Clausewitz’s celebrated aphorism summarises this succinctly: “War is simply the continuation of political intercourse with the addition of other means.”

one end and the most ambitious and absolute at the other.¹² For the purposes of this monograph, the word “policy” means a goal of national strategy; it does not have connotations of any party political interest. However, policy is the product of politics in that it is formulated as a consequence of the analysis, calculations, deal making, debates and decisions that make up the day-to-day political intercourse of the polity in question. Therefore, in some political systems, party politics will almost inevitably influence the formulation of policy. In so-called *wars of choice* conducted by liberal democracies, domestic political imperatives may trump the demands of a military campaign in resource prioritisation decisions.

This monograph contends that imposing our will and realising a political outcome involves controlling, to a sufficient degree, the adversary’s policy choices (not necessarily requiring his complete subjugation).¹³ It is fundamentally about “getting our way,” which depends on changing

¹² The greater the issue at stake, the greater usually the intensity with which the war is fought and the greater the resources invested in it. When contemplating the nature of war, Clausewitz introduced the notion of “war in its absolute perfection” (Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds. and trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), Page 593). This is a Platonic ideal: a conceptual abstraction helpful for exploring the nature of war, but unattainable in reality. (Clausewitz had in mind the example of the Napoleonic Wars where “War untrammelled by any conventional constraints had broken loose in all its elemental fury” (Clausewitz, *Ibid.*, Page 593)). The word “perfection” is not meant to be understood in the sense of being a “good thing” but in the sense of approaching its philosophical ideal, or apotheosis. In practical execution, all wars fall short of this “ideal” being constrained by any number of contingent factors. (Arguably, the most significant constraints derive from the importance ascribed to the political objective, which defines the limitations placed on the amount of force used and the ways it is employed to achieve that objective.) All wars are, in this sense, “limited;” but it is a matter of degree. World War Two was an ideologically-driven, existential war of survival for several of the participants. This was reflected in the extent to which national will was mobilised towards its full potential and in the “no holds barred” way in which it was often fought. Such was its scale and intensity, being fought for the complete overthrow of the enemy and using ways and means that stretched to the elastic limits what was feasible at the time, World War Two is often described as an example of “total war.” It is, perhaps, the closest the world has come to date to matching Clausewitz’s abstract ideal of “war in its absolute perfection.” The wars and conflicts that followed it in the Cold War and beyond are generally seen as being “limited wars” by comparison. (All-out nuclear war is probably the nearest approximation to absolute war, although its instrumental value is difficult to divine given its self-defeating absurdity.)

¹³ Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Chapters 17 and 18. The concept of “imposing our will” (“victory”) requires nuanced interpretation: it does not necessarily involve the complete subjugation of the enemy and his people as some interpretations of

attitudes, and thence behaviour, in a way favourable to our interests, ideally on an enduring basis. It requires our opponents to embrace our vision of their political future: they must be convinced to accept this changed political order. (Understanding how this might be achieved, and whether it might be achieved within acceptable costs, are prominent questions.) The concept of control is of cardinal importance.¹⁴ Control is a function of the successful exercise of power, which is a complex and contested concept, and central to any analysis of the achievement of political outcomes. British doctrine defines power as the capacity to influence the behaviour of people and the course of events.¹⁵ Simplistically put, power is thus about getting people to do what we want them to do (more particularly, what they might otherwise not wish to do); this can be achieved in myriad ways, including coercion, influence, inducement and indoctrination.

The centrality of the political dimension was given contemporary resonance by General David Petraeus, Commander Multinational Forces- Iraq (MNF-I), when he observed starkly of the challenges facing him in 2007 that “it’s all about the politics.”¹⁶ Against this backdrop, the key issue considered by this paper is how military force contributes, alongside other instruments of national power,¹⁷ to the realisation of desired political outcomes (national security goals)

Clausewitz have judged. It more realistically involves achieving a sufficient degree of control or influence over the enemy’s policy choices to ensure we “get our way.”

¹⁴ Rear Admiral John C Wylie, *Military Strategy: a General Theory of Power Control*, (Pittsburgh: Rutgers University Press, 1967), Page 79. “The aim of war is some measure of control over the enemy...the ultimate determinant in war is the man on the scene with a gun...if the strategist is forced to strive for final and ultimate control, he must establish, or must present as an inevitable prospect, a man on the scene with a gun. This is the soldier.”

¹⁵ UK *Joint Doctrine Publication (JDP) 04*, (HMSO, December 2010), Page 1-1.

¹⁶ Discussions between General David Petraeus, Commander MNF-I and HQ MND(SE) staff, Basra, February 2007.

¹⁷ UK *Joint Doctrine Publication (JDP) 0-01, British Defence Doctrine*, (HMSO, 3rd Edition, August 2008), Page 1-4, Paragraph 117. British doctrine recognises 3 instruments of national power: diplomatic, economic and military. It judges that information underpins all instruments of power and it is not considered to be a discrete instrument in its own right.

amidst the complexity of the contemporary operating environment¹⁸ dominated by discretionary¹⁹ intervention operations/COIN. In addressing this, it is first necessary to examine further the conceptual basis for the application of force in pursuit of policy goals. Doctrine propounds a framework of *ends*, *ways* and *means*.²⁰ Being predominant, ends logically should command the means sufficient to resource the optimum ways to deliver them. Theoretically, if the means available are insufficient to achieve the ends, within the bounds of realistic ways, then, either the means should be increased, or the policy ambitions of the ends should be moderated. This rarely happens. Sometimes, commanders may have to juggle insufficient resources, in imaginative ways, to deliver over-ambitious ends. A wise commander understands that his ways are circumscribed and defined by his means.

Strategy, according to Colin Gray, is “the bridge that connects the world of policy and military power. It is strategy that interprets the meaning of policy for military power, and which must devise schemes for the threat or use of force to serve the purposes of policy.”²¹ Strategy marks out the practical steps to be followed by military force integrated with other elements of

¹⁸ Frank G Hoffman, “Hybrid Warfare and Challenges,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, (Issue 52, 1st Quarter 2009).

¹⁹ UK *Joint Doctrine Publication (JDP)*, JDP 0-01, *British Defence Doctrine*, (HMSO, 3rd Edition, August 2008), Paragraph 3A3. In British terms, “discretionary operations” are those operations conducted to promote and defend British interests worldwide rather than to defend against a direct threat to the UK and its overseas territories - or to honour alliance obligations - where there is an absolute imperative to respond to a threat with armed force. “Discretionary” implies a greater degree of choice.

²⁰ *Army Doctrine Publication Land Operations*, (HMSO, May 2005), Paragraph 0206. Ends are goals. Ways are schemes devised to apply available means to achieve ends. Means are resources available/necessary to achieve the goals. Ends, ways and means should be harmonised.

²¹ Colin S Gray, *Another Bloody Century*, (London: Wiedenfield and Nicholson, 2005), Page 39. UK *Joint Doctrine Publication (JDP)*, JDP 0-01, *British Defence Doctrine*, (HMSO, 3rd Edition, August 2008), Pages 1-3. British doctrine adopts a wider perspective on strategy: “National strategy directs the coordinated application of the instruments of national power [diplomatic, economic and military]...in the pursuit of national policy aspirations... Military strategy is not simply another term for Defence policy. Defence policy establishes the ends of military strategy and, in the normal course of events, shapes the structures and capabilities of the Armed Forces within resource and other constraints. Strategy is particularly concerned with the political consequences and advantages of the threat and use of force.”

national power in order to ensure policy goals are realised. Military commanders and policy makers need a firm grasp of *the art of the possible* (an understanding of what can realistically be achieved by the amount and type of force available and - crucially - within the time available).²² If policy asks too much of the military instrument, success may prove elusive.²³ Clausewitz asserts the sovereignty of policy, whose influence is to be welcomed, but policy must recognise the limits of what is achievable by force.²⁴ Military missions (at the strategic and operational levels if not at the tactical level) are usually framed in terms of achieving a policy goal: the *political end-state*.²⁵ However, end-states are often articulated as “conditions” that are not always readily achievable by military ways and means (it is sometimes challenging to shoot one’s way to a condition). As US general and diplomat Maxwell Taylor observed: “It is common practice for officials to define foreign policy goals in the broad generalities of peace, prosperity, cooperation

²² The provenance of the phrase “the art of the possible” is usually traced to the 19th Century German statesman, Otto Von Bismarck. In a remark made to Prince Meyer Von Waldeck in August 1867, Bismarck reportedly observed that “Politics is the art of the possible, of the attainable....the art of the next best.” Fred Shapiro, editor, *Yale Book of Quotations*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

²³ Colin S. Gray, *Fighting Talk*, (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2008), Page 48. To be successful, strategy must be firmly grounded in realism: “Strategy is a practical business. If the troops cannot do it, policy is mere vanity.”

²⁴ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds. and trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), Page 608. “No major proposal required for war can be worked out in ignorance of political factors; and when people talk... about harmful political influence on the management of war, they are not really saying what they mean. Their quarrel should be with the policy itself, not with its influence. If the policy is right...any intentional effect it has on the conduct of the war can only be to the good. If it has the opposite effect the policy itself is wrong...Only if statesmen look to certain military...actions to produce effects that are foreign to their nature do political decisions influence operations for the worse.”

²⁵ UK *Joint Doctrine Publication (JDP)*, *JDP 0-01, British Defence Doctrine*, (HMSO, 3rd Edition, August 2008). A political end-state is defined in British doctrine as “That state of affairs which needs to be achieved at the end of a campaign either to terminate or to resolve the conflict on favourable terms. The end-state should be established prior to execution.”

and goodwill – unimpeachable as ideals but of little use in determining the specific [military] objective we are likely to pursue, and the time, place and intensity of our efforts.”²⁶

According to Clausewitz, the value ascribed to the political objective should determine the level of effort and methods deemed appropriate to achieve it.²⁷ However, this begs the fundamental question as to whether the political object should provide the rationale and disciplining influence on the conduct of war (normative analysis), or whether it actually does this in practice (empiricist analysis). Professor Hew Strachan notes: “in long wars, the Clausewitzian norm that war is an instrument of policy is turned on its head. Short sharp wars, like the German Wars of Unification in 1864, 1866 and 1870, have the best chances of delivering the political objectives of those who initiate them. In long wars, war shapes and moulds policy.”²⁸ For war to have utility, it should be the continuation of policy with the addition of other means as Clausewitz observed. This is war’s most cogent justification - its rational instrumentality - and surely its only redeeming feature when set against its inherent misery and destruction. Unhappily, however, history is replete with examples where war has escaped the bounds of rationality and has seemed to serve its own nature rather than to be instrumental in achieving a policy goal.²⁹ As Clausewitz

²⁶ Robert Mandel, *The Meaning of Military Victory*, (London: Lynne Rienner, 2006), Page 6.

²⁷ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds. and trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), Page 579. Clausewitz observed: “No one starts a war - or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so - without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it. The former is its political purpose; the latter its operational objective. This is the governing principle which will set its course, prescribe the scale of means and effort which is required, and make its influence felt throughout down to the smallest operational detail.”

²⁸ Professor Hew Strachan, “Strategy and the Limitation of War,” *Survival*, (Volume 50, Number 1, February – March 2008), Page 46.

²⁹ This is illustrated by the experience of Nazi Germany, which continued fighting beyond the end of 1944 by which time most rational observers had concluded that the war was lost. Such was the perversity of the regime that it revered war for its own sake rather than for its instrumentality. It continued to fight, illogically, to the point of its utter destruction – an outcome Hitler embraced as the just verdict of History on the German “Volk” for having proved themselves to be “inferior” to their invaders from the East. Correspondence with Professor Hew Strachan November 2010

observed, war is a “paradoxical trinity” comprising not only reason, but also passion and chance which can subvert its rational purpose.³⁰ Borrowing the term “friction” from Newtonian Physics, Clausewitz appositely described the cumulative effect of non-rational influences that degrade war’s efficiency as an instrument of policy.

War is quintessentially adversarial and interactive: *the enemy has a vote* and the aims of the antagonists often change in response to their gains or losses. Campaigns rarely develop in a linear fashion as predicted by original planning assumptions; there must be a constant reframing of ends, ways and means to take account of the ever-changing context.³¹ Dialogue between policy makers and the military must be continuous, updating understanding about desired goals and the feasibility of achieving them within accepted resource, risk and policy tolerances. This process of responding to unfolding events, and revising judgments in the light of sacrifices endured and triumphs gained, can subvert the rational pursuit of policy goals, which may thus be overtaken by

³⁰ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds. and trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), Page 89. Clausewitz observes that war is subject to a number of influences, which are often contradictory and in tension with each other. Reinforcing this, Michael Howard and Colin Gray emphasise the enduring relevance of Thucydides’ triptych of “fear, honour and interests” as the principal motivations for armed conflict. Interests may determine the political issues at stake, certainly in limited wars, and fear may tend to escalate the level of violence towards the absolute form of war but, “honour,” however defined, is what inflames the passions of the people. Honour, like fear, removes critical decisions from the rational, controlling and dispassionate hands of the diplomats. Colin S Gray, *Another Bloody Century*, (London: Wiedenfield and Nicholson, 2005), Pages 394 - 397. Professor Michael Howard, “When are Wars Decisive?” *Survival*, (Volume 41, Number 1, Spring 1999), Pages 126 – 135.

³¹ The Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle is perhaps an apt theoretic model borrowed from Physics to capture the fact that any intervention, or action, in the operational area inevitably changes its nature, potentially invalidating the original assumptions about it, thus requiring a reassessment of our understanding of the operational context. In very simplistic terms, the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle has it that the very action of observing an object (an intervention) changes the position of that object. It is impossible to know both the momentum and location of an object. This is because the action of even one photon striking the object - an essential precursor to reflecting data back to the observer, which is a prerequisite for observation to occur - changes the location of the object being observed, albeit in a sub atomic way. (BBC 2 Website entry dated 10 June 2003.) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/place-devon/A408638> (Accessed 9 Feb 12).

events.³² Historian Beatrice Heuser observes that, in reality, the interaction between policy makers and their military in the formulation and execution of strategy rarely conforms to the simplicity of the Clausewitzian formula; it is beset by a multiplicity of influences, often in tension with one another, which complicate the process, potentially leading to incoherence.³³ In short, the political dividend of the application of force is not empirically predictable; instead, the outcome is often uncertain and ambiguous and the *law of unintended consequences* has free rein.

The potentially differing perspectives and imperatives of political and military leaders may complicate the formulation of strategy and the application of force. If military action is contemplated, military commanders generally prefer to have a firm decision, as early as possible, about the desired ends so that they can commence the requisite planning to determine the appropriate ways and means. In anything other than small-scale operations, military logistical preparation almost invariably requires significant lead times. The effort to get the right combination of forces and capabilities, suitably equipped and provisioned, in the right place at the right time to conduct operations is a key consideration. In contrast, politicians and diplomats tend to wish to make a decision to resort to the use of force as late as possible to give all other

³² Fred Ikle, *Every War Must End*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), Pages 8-16. Ikle notes that as the casualties mounted and national level of effort intensified during the course of the First World War, combatants on all sides felt unable to settle for anything less than a complete victory, because to do so would have been a betrayal of the sacrifices made.

³³ Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Page 489. "The Clausewitzian model according to which governments make decisions about the use of military force with political objects in mind is in itself a crude over-simplification: any one decision-maker will have several objectives, some mutually exclusive or conflicting, and any group of decision-makers will have even more heterogeneous ranging from the promotion of their own career to the interests of the state they lead or the protection of international order and peace. They may have mistaken views about the possibilities offered by the military means available to them or about the convictions, ideology, interests, intentions and capabilities of their adversaries and a host of other factors. Their perceptions and thus their objectives may change over time, and this is likely to be a function of their appreciation of the evolution of the military conflict itself."

measures the maximum time and opportunity to resolve the dispute.³⁴ Instinctively, political decision makers will seek maximum flexibility. Therefore, any military advice proffered about the use of force should seek to provide the political authorities with a range of realistic options that can be modified easily to meet the opportunities and threats that emerge as the situation unfolds.³⁵ Military advice should articulate the likely downstream consequences of any course of action and be cognisant of the potentialities of the emergent strategic context, looking to generate further openings to gain advantage.³⁶

School of Advanced Air and Space Studies Professor Everett Dolman observes that, whilst the tactical level may be primarily concerned with culmination and the achievement of specific, fixed goals; the strategic level is emphatically concerned with continuation. Complex social problems can rarely be completely solved. At best, they are resolved continuously - transforming prevailing conditions to a more acceptable state - an improvement rather than a solution. Strategy is an unending process: no political condition is permanent so the goal of the strategist is to ensure a favourable continuation of events relative to competitors, even if this means settling for something that is sub-optimal but good enough as the basis for continued interaction. Strategy at its simplest is an approach to “attaining continuous advantage.”³⁷

In this analysis, whilst the traditional military decision making methodology with its teleological, fixed end state focus, is entirely appropriate at the tactical level, such a mechanistic

³⁴ House of Commons Defence Committee, *Lessons of Iraq, Third Report of Session 2003-04*, Volume 1, Report, Printed 3 March 2004, Paragraph 25. Further comment is contained at Paragraphs 52 – 57; and 187 – 193.

³⁵ AOASF fieldwork and discussions with Obama Administration officials 2011.

³⁶ In contradiction to this desire for political flexibility, large-scale land commitments, such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, tend to constrain agility, limiting options and political room for manoeuvre. They fix forces in place and may close off, rather than open up, opportunities. Moreover, extraction from them can be conspicuously difficult. Such options are likely to be politically unattractive.

³⁷ Everett C Dolman, *Pure Strategy*, (New York: Frank Cass, 2005), Pages 4 - 11.

approach might be inadequate to cope with the complexities and dynamism of the strategic context. According to General Systems Theory, biological and social systems are “complex” since they are open and adaptive, interacting with their environment. In consequence, they generate infinite permutations of outcomes making them so complex as to defy a predictable, linear cause and effect explanation. An expectation of a predictable cause and effect relationship is characteristic of closed system logic and more applicable to mechanical systems. There are simply too many variables in a complex, open system for it to be fully knowable.³⁸ Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect to be able to impose (at least with any degree of assurance) fixed, pre-determined outcomes.³⁹

This thinking chimes with the philosophy of *design* to the extent that it advocates an alternative approach of exploiting the inherent tensions, tendencies and motive forces within a system (its potential and propensity) to manipulate them to nudge the system in a direction favourable to our interests, but also in a manner consistent with the system’s own internal logic. The 19th Century German statesman, Otto Von Bismarck, observed tellingly that: “a statesman cannot create anything himself. He must wait and listen until he hears the steps of God sounding through events; then leap up and grasp the hem of his garment.”⁴⁰ Bismarck recognised that he could not force events into the pattern he wished, or determine the precise outcome. Instead, his avowed approach was to calculate the way events were going and then attempt to take advantage of them for his own purposes.

³⁸ Frans Osinga, *Science, Strategy and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd*, (London: Routledge, 2007), Pages 73 – 82.

³⁹ AOASF Design Phase classroom discussions 2, 4 and 5 August 2011.

⁴⁰ Richard J Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), Page 3.

Colin Gray is one of many authors who have analysed the nature of victory and considered how battlefield success might be translated into political advantage, the objective for which war is waged.⁴¹ He cautions that the results of force should not be seen in stark terms of “defeat” or “victory,” preferring to talk about “strategic success” and “strategic advantage.”⁴² Imposing our will does not necessarily involve the complete subjugation of the enemy.⁴³ Rather, there needs to be a more nuanced interpretation centring on the achievement of sufficient leverage over the enemy to ensure that he behaves in the way that we wish. Although they are polar opposites, victory and defeat are not binary. Representing extremes of a continuum, there are many permutations of potential outcomes in between them. Imposing one’s will at the tactical level – winning on the battlefield – does not guarantee the achievement of the desired policy outcome. Furthermore, the difficulty of defining the elusive/polymorphous nature of victory is exacerbated because “winning” and “losing” is a matter of perspective.⁴⁴ Thus, the value of force as a policy tool is limited not only when it fails to fulfill its normative function; but it is also an imperfect instrument even when it does function normatively.

⁴¹ For example, see Jan Angstrom and Isabelle Duyvesteyn, eds. *Understanding Victory and Defeat in Contemporary War*, (London: Routledge, 2007). (Contributors additional to Duvesteyn and Angstrom include: Robert Mandel, Gil Merom, Dominic Johnson, Dominic Tierney, Ian F W Beckett, Ivan Arreguin-Toft, Stephen Biddle and Kersti Larsdotter).

⁴² Colin S Gray, “Defining and Achieving Decisive Victory,” (Carlisle PA: Strategic Studies Institute Monograph, April 2002), Page 12. Gray notes that strategic success and strategic advantage “fall notably short of the forcible disarmament of the enemy... most belligerents seek an end to hostilities well before the point where their power to resist is totally dismantled. The idea of decisive victory, therefore, should not be equated necessarily with the military obliteration of the enemy. All that it requires is a sufficiency of military success to enable achievement of whatever it is that policy identifies as the war’s political object.”

⁴³ See Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁴⁴ J Boone Bartolomees, “A Theory of Victory,” *Parameters*, (Summer 2008). “Victory in war is... an assessment, not a fact or condition. It is someone’s opinion or an amalgamation of opinions. Victory in war may or may not have anything to do with objective criteria such as casualties or territory taken or lost. In winning a war, those things matter - at least at some level and always in terms of their effect on perception - but what matters most is the ultimate perception of the situation, not the facts.”

The Character of Military Force

To conflate the thoughts of Colin Gray and General Sir Rupert Smith, the principal distinguishing character of military force, that which sets it apart, is its ability to “kill people and break things.”⁴⁵ Whilst it has ancillary uses,⁴⁶ the core function of armed force is legitimate “killing and breaking” in the service of the state, (its legitimacy is a conspicuously significant distinction).⁴⁷ “Killing and breaking” is essentially tactical activity but its effects can be exploited to deter, deny and prevent (and by extension to protect). It can also enable the seizure of valuable assets and the occupation of territory. Force disarms the opponent, reducing his ability to defend himself, thus rendering him more biddable. Threatening or seizing something that the enemy values, creates leverage over him influencing his cost/gain calculus, so shaping his policy choices.⁴⁸ The physical effects of force enfranchise its psychological power. Physical destruction and attrition of the enemy’s resources not only diminishes his capacity to carry out his preferred course of action, it may also weaken his will. The power to hurt, whether threatened, or actually

⁴⁵ Colin S Gray, *Another Bloody Century*, (London: Wiedenfield and Nicholson, 2005), Page 48; General Sir Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force*, (London: Allen Lane, 2005), Page 6.

⁴⁶ These ancillary uses include amongst others: capacity building and the training of indigenous forces; delivering humanitarian aid and disaster relief; rudimentary stabilisation and reconstruction activity.

⁴⁷ Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, edited by Roth and Widdich, (London: Bedminster Press, 1968). Max Weber defined the State through its monopoly on the legitimate use of force within its borders.

⁴⁸ General Sir Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force*, (London: Allen Lane, 2005), Pages 320 – 21. Smith assesses that there are four broad effects that the military could achieve once sent into action in any given political confrontation or conflict: ameliorate; contain; deter/coerce; destroy. *Ameliorate* does not involve the application of military force, being concerned with disaster relief, training and advising, and military observer missions. *Contain* potentially involves the use of force since it aims to establish a barrier to prevent something from spreading; typically this concerns operations to prevent trade sanctions from being broken, arms from being supplied or certain weapons from being used as in the enforcement of a no-fly zone. Force is used locally in response to attempts to breach the barrier or in self-defence. *Deter/coerce* involves the wider use of force since the military deploy to pose a threat to some party or carry out a threat against them to change or form their opinions. *Destroy* involves the application of force to eliminate the enemy’s physical ability to achieve his policy goal.

enforced, underpins the value of coercive force as an instrument of statecraft.⁴⁹ Thomas Schelling observed:

... 'victory' inadequately expresses what a nation wants from its military forces. Mostly it wants....the influence that resides in latent force....the bargaining power that comes from the capacity to hurt, not just the direct consequence of successful military action. Even total victory over an enemy provides at best an opportunity for unopposed violence against the enemy populations. How to use that opportunity in the national interest....can be just as important as the achievement itself...⁵⁰

In similar vein, Edward Luttwak characterises the influence derived from this power to hurt as “armed suasion.”⁵¹ Understanding the relationship between the physical and psychological dimensions of force, in the specific context in which its use, or threat, is contemplated, is fundamental to maximising its value. However, this is challenging because it is so heavily dependent on subjective rather than objective judgments.⁵²

The value of armed force as an instrument of “decision” may once have rested in the fact that by defeating the enemy’s army in battle, in an act of *force majeure*, it removed it as a protective shield and opened his country and people to despoliation. It was then within the gift of the victor to loot and burn property; and to murder or sell the population into slavery. The choice available to the defeated party was essentially twofold. Either they could accept the verdict of battle, seek terms and subject themselves to the will and control of the victor (thus enabling him to achieve his desired political outcome); or they could choose to resist and risk enduring the

⁴⁹ Edward Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), Page VI. Luttwak observes “Military force can sometimes be used to achieve an objective forcibly, without persuasion or intimidation; usually though – throughout history but particularly now – military potential is used to influence other countries, their government and their people, by the harm it could do to them.”

⁵⁰ Thomas C Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), Page 31.

⁵¹ Edward Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), Page 218.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Page 219.

violent predations of the victorious army. The attitude of the victors to the defeated might be summarised as “do what we tell you to do, or we will hurt you; you know that there is nothing you can do to stop us.” This threat, implied or explicitly stated, may often have been sufficient to induce compliance and cooperation with the victor.⁵³ People obey to avoid being hurt. However, there are also instances where this coercive potential was translated into reality as an act of policy to terrorise a civilian population.⁵⁴ A host of moral and legal norms moderates this atavistic power to hurt in the contemporary context (certainly for Western democracies) and governs policy choices consciously limiting the level of violence deemed acceptable and proportionate to achieve the designated political aim.⁵⁵ This corpus of rules and norms, which in part defines a civilised state in Western terms, circumscribes the use of force and bears heavily on its utility.

⁵³ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Rex Warner, trans. (London: Penguin Books, 1954), Page 402. Thucydides’s account of the “Melian Dialogue” during the Peloponnesian War is often cited as a classic example of the dynamics of coercion. In seeking acquiescence to their demands, Athenian emissaries advised the Melians starkly “The strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.” Ultimately, the Melian leadership was not cowed into submission by Athenian threats and they chose defiance instead. The Athenians subsequently applied their superior force and crushed Melian resistance, sacking their city, killing all fighting age males and enslaving all their women and children.

⁵⁴ There are numerous historical examples where hostile powers have used the power to hurt to gain leverage over an enemy. Having first shattered the protective shield of the defending army, invading armies proceeded to despoil the now vulnerable enemy people and their land. Two examples include: William the Conqueror’s “Harrying of the North” 1069/70; and the Chevauchees of Edward the Black Prince in France during the 100 Years War. Motivations included plundering for personal enrichment, but also involved the extraction of key resources such as food, livestock and money, to deny their use to the enemy power. The Harrying of the North witnessed extreme violence used to punish and subjugate a recalcitrant population. In the case of Edward’s Chevauchees, violence was used in part to undermine the French economy and war making potential, and in part to demonstrate to the people that their sovereign could not protect them, undermining his legitimacy.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/normans/after_01.shtml
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/middle_ages/hundred_years_war_01.shtml (Accessed 26 Feb 2012).

⁵⁵ Colin S Gray, *Another Bloody Century*, (London: Wiedenfield and Nicholson, 2005), Page 395. As Colin Gray observes, what is deemed an acceptable level of violence, proportionate to the desired political end state, is context dependent. The calculus will vary according to the perceived value of the issue at stake. Current norms are not necessarily enduring. “If fear, honour and interest are engaged with sufficient intensity, no prior diplomatic agreements, laws or ethical precepts, will serve to regulate the character of warfare. When survival is at stake, then end will always be held to justify whatever means are believed likely to be effective.”

Many would see this as an essential framework within which force must be applied; indeed the *sine qua non*. However, from a pure utilitarian perspective, it reduces the coercive potential of armed force. Some of our opponents may not be so fastidiously observant of these norms of behaviour, even if they recognise them in the first place; this may provide them with an asymmetric advantage.

The ultimate expression of hard power, armed force has greatest utility in an interstate context where its effects, such as deterrence, coercion and compellance, are focused on an enemy government in control of its people.⁵⁶ However, leveraging the potential of hard power, even in interstate relations, is challenging. The US is the most powerful nation on Earth, militarily: its defence spending accounts for as much as that of the next 17 nations combined⁵⁷ and is in excess of 40% of the world total; yet the fungibility of its hard power is limited in the current operational context. The US finds it hard to convert its military preponderance into desired outcomes: witness the frustrations in “getting its way” with states such Pakistan and Iran. Moreover, the generation of hard power capabilities is expensive and, arguably, the US does not get a return commensurate with its investment, measured in terms of desired policy outcomes. Furthermore, hard power is relatively less productive in a situation where control of the people is contested, making it imperative to secure the willing co-operation of the critical mass of the people, which places

⁵⁶ Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1999), Appendix 1, Pages 191 – 200. Deterrence seeks to dissuade an opponent from carrying out a particular course of action that we oppose, by threatening to inflict a prohibitively high degree of punishment upon him as a consequence of his actions. The distinction between coercion and compellance is nuanced. Generally, in coercion the target is necessarily an active agent in that he has to agree (admittedly, having been forced into this position by the actual application of, or threat of, our force) to comply with our will. In compellence the enemy’s actions are physically controlled by force majeure; strictly speaking, he has no choice about whether or not he wishes to comply.

⁵⁷ By “RM” “Defence Spending: Always more, or else” *The Economist*, Washington D.C. 1December 2011. <http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2011/12/defence-spending> (Accessed 12 Feb 12).

greater emphasis on persuasion than on coercion. Edmund Burke observed when reflecting on the struggle for freedom of the American colonies: “The use of force alone is but temporary. It may subdue for the moment; but it does not remove the necessity for subduing again: and a nation is not governed, which is perpetually to be conquered.”⁵⁸

Burke’s observation about the ephemeral nature of coercion is persuasive. Rule by consent, an internalised and values-based control mechanism, is superior to externally imposed discipline. Hard power cannot indoctrinate, inspire or implant an ideology leading to an enduring change of attitudes that translates into political success.⁵⁹ This falls more within the gift of *soft power* and *smart power* which mobilise variously diplomatic, socio-economic, informational and cultural resources to attract, persuade and convince.⁶⁰ Whilst military success can create opportunities for these other instruments to be applied, force alone cannot directly deliver the desired political outcome. This is perhaps best explained using the framework of conflict termination and resolution.

Conflict Termination and Conflict Resolution

Conflict termination is concerned with activity leading to the formal end of fighting, but not the end of the conflict since fighting may have stopped without the underlying causes of the conflict being resolved. Conflict termination lies predominantly in the military domain. Conflict resolution, which involves reconciliation and the assuaging of the root causes that motivated the outbreak of hostilities to produce a lasting and stable settlement, is the province of civil

⁵⁸ Edmund Burke, Speech on Conciliation with America, 1775.

⁵⁹ “Military power can protect and deter and punish, it cannot alter ideological convictions,” Richard Gwynn, quoted in *The Meaning of Military Victory*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2006), Page 177.

⁶⁰ Joseph S Nye *Soft Power, The Means to Success in World Politics*, (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2004).

agencies.⁶¹ Military campaigns should be planned and executed according to the demands of conflict resolution.⁶² Failing to do this neglects to deal with the reasons the conflict occurred in the first place; and any “victory” is likely only to be temporary – a pause rather than an end.⁶³ Whilst this is an entirely logical approach, it does not imply a belief that military force - or other instruments of national power - can necessarily be effective in resolving conflict. Some problems may be so intractable that they are simply not amenable to complete resolution. Consistent with the analysis of Dolman cited earlier, the goal in such situations might be simply to seek outcomes that amount to an acceptable improvement, albeit sub-optimal. Even if the underlying causes of the conflict are properly diagnosed, underpinned by an adequate understanding of the local political, cultural and social dynamics (which is a major challenge judged by the experience of Iraq and Afghanistan), and even if properly resourced, there simply may not be sufficient time (strategic patience) for the treatment to be applied effectively. British commentator Anthony King’s analysis of the Hamkari initiative launched in 2010 by the Afghan Government and ISAF to enhance security in Kandahar captures well the complexity of such situations.⁶⁴

The label “decisive” is sometimes unhelpfully associated exclusively with military conflict termination activity, placing undue emphasis on battlefield success.⁶⁵ Military “victory” is often

⁶¹ William Flavin, “Planning for Conflict Termination and Post-Conflict Success,” *Parameters*, Autumn 2003, Pages 95 – 112 . “Conflict termination and resolution clearly are not the same thing. [Conflict resolution] is a long process. It is primarily a civil problem that may require military support. Through advantageous [conflict termination], however, the military can set the conditions for successful [conflict resolution].”

⁶² Discussions with Brigadier (now Major General) J I Bashall CBE, Commander Joint Force Operations, UK Permanent Joint HQ, November 2010.

⁶³ Personal correspondence with Dr Chris Tuck, Kings College London, November 2010.

⁶⁴ Anthony King, “The Power of Politics: Hamkari and the Future of the Afghan War,” *RUSI Journal*, (December 2010, Volume 155, Number 6), (155:6 68-74).

⁶⁵ Discussions with Brigadier (now Major General) J I Bashall CBE, Commander Joint Force Operations, UK Permanent Joint HQ, November 2010.

necessary but it is not sufficient. War is about the better peace it is designed to shape so military success is the beginning not the end of the process. The celebrated exchange between US Colonel Summers and North Vietnamese Colonel Tu is oft-quoted to the point of cliché but it nonetheless reveals an essential truth about the relationship between military activity and political success. Summers remarked that the Vietnamese never beat the US on the battlefield. Tu replied that this might be true but it was also irrelevant.⁶⁶ This underlines that it is conflict resolution, which has the true power of decision because, if successful, it leads to the realisation of the political objective. The dominance of the political dimension is particularly stark during COIN, as French expert David Galula observed: "[a judgment that] revolutionary war is 20% military action and 80% political is a formula that reflects the truth"⁶⁷.

When Wars Are Decisive

General Smith, in expounding "War Amongst the People," wrote that the objectives for which we fight in contemporary operations have become "sub strategic."⁶⁸ We fight to produce conditions such as a "safe and secure environment" (SSE) that enable others to resolve the cause of the conflict; as opposed to applying force to deliver directly the desired political outcome,

⁶⁶ Harry G. Summers, Jr, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982).

⁶⁷ David Galula, *Counter Insurgency Warfare – Theory and Practice*, (New York: Praeger Security International Edition published in 2006), Page 64. Many contemporary commentators would agree with Galula's judgement. Although his work posthumously influenced the revitalisation of US COIN doctrine and guided the conduct of the US *Surge* in Iraq, it is not certain that the approach of Western powers engaged in Afghanistan and Iraq always reflected Galula's analysis. This may explain, in part, the troubled path to progress in these theatres of operations. It is pertinent for Western nations to review their performance and ask whether 80% of their effort has been political. And if not, how has this affected their prospects of success.

⁶⁸ General Sir Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: the Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), Page 3.

without the need to establish the mediating condition of the SSE.⁶⁹ Contrasting “War Amongst the People” with the older paradigm he calls “Industrial War,” Smith says we now employ force to “capture the will of the people.”⁷⁰ Smith’s argument is elegant but it may overstate the case since it is doubtful how far military force, even the overwhelming force used to defeat Germany and Japan in 1945, ever directly delivered the desired political outcome. However, it does set the conditions for other instruments of power.⁷¹

Professor Michael Howard notes that military success merely creates political opportunities for the victors to exploit (with varying degrees of success) to realise their policy goals: “Few wars...are any longer decided on the battlefield (if indeed they ever were). They are decided at the peace table. Military victories do not determine the outcome of wars; they only provide

⁶⁹ Ibid., Page 270. Smith writes: “The ends for which we fight are changing from the hard objectives that decide a political outcome to those of establishing conditions in which the outcome may be decided...Industrial War had clear cut strategic goals. It has been used to create states, destroy the evil of Fascism and end the Ottoman Empire. In War Amongst the People, however, the ends....are...more complex and less strategic...the driving ideal behind Industrial War was that the political objective was achieved by achieving a strategic military objective of such significance that the enemy conformed to our will – the intention being to settle the matter by military force.”

⁷⁰ Ibid., Page 271. Smith observes “[In contrast]...we now tend to conduct operations for softer, more malleable, complex, sub-strategic objectives. We do not intervene in order to take or hold territory; in fact once an intervention has occurred a main pre-occupation is how to leave the territory rather than to keep it...[W]e intervene....to establish a condition in which a political objective can be achieved by other means and in other ways. We seek to create a conceptual space for diplomacy, economic incentives, political pressure...to create a desired political outcome of stability and, if possible, democracy.”

⁷¹ Assuredly, the unconditional surrender forced upon Nazi Germany and Japan, the overthrow of their totalitarian regimes and occupation of their territories, was only made possible by the comprehensive defeat of their armed forces and the destruction of their war making capacity. However, the rehabilitation of West Germany and Japan as liberal democracies and responsible members of the International Community were unequivocally political achievements. (The post-war recovery was jump-started by the largesse of the Marshall Plan and promoted in part by the decision of the Western Allies to re-arm West Germany as a bulwark against the Soviet threat.) Military victory provided the opportunity; but it was the statesmen who determined the political landscape of the post-war world. They decided precisely how the military dividend would be translated into political effect. Many possible political outcomes could have followed the Allied victory, but nothing was deterministically fixed by the fact of military victory; the statesmen could have squandered the opportunity. It is true, however, that the physical presence in overwhelming numbers of Red Army soldiers in Poland, Hungary, Rumania and other central and eastern European states meant that these countries were more likely to fall into the Soviet rather than Western sphere of influence in the post war settlement.

political opportunities for the victors – and even these opportunities are likely to be limited by circumstances beyond their control.”⁷² For force to deliver a favourable political outcome, the defeated people must accept the fact of their defeat and become reconciled to this by being treated as partners in the new international order.⁷³ Howard observes that wars can be decisive when: the enemy has suffered sufficient damage that he is dissuaded from continuing to use force to secure his objectives; he is isolated diplomatically from external support; an enemy government exists which has sufficient control over its people to ensure that it abides by the provisions of a peace settlement.⁷⁴ Significantly, only the first of Howard’s stipulations falls to the military and it counts little if the military accomplishes its task but statesmen fail to deliver the other two. Howard’s prescription applies particularly to traditional interstate war: a formal surrender, leading to a peace treaty, is a powerful political and psychological tool to confirm the verdict of battle, persuading the defeated people to accept their defeat and fulfill their obligations.

In traditional interstate war, there is an expectation of a clear-cut, binary distinction between war and peace. The surrender by one side and the signing of a peace treaty heralds the transition from a condition of war to one of peace. However, COIN or an occupation presents a

⁷² Professor Michael Howard, “When are Wars Decisive?” *Survival*, (Volume 41, Number 1, Spring 1999), Pages 126 – 135.

⁷³ Ibid., “Honour must be satisfied, unless the defeated peoples are to be massacred or reduced to perpetual slavery. This means that the incumbent government of the defeated power must itself accept defeat, persuade its people to do the same and....be treated with respect by the victors.”

⁷⁴ Ibid., “The scale of defeat of the enemy must be such that he is either disarmed completely or he comes to realise that the cost of continuing the conflict will be prohibitively high and disproportionate to the gains he seeks to achieve. The defeated party must be isolated from all external sources of assistance, thereby losing any hope of reversing the verdict of the war. Even if the defeated power is not fully reconciled to its losses, it must at least be prepared to live with them. Most importantly, in a state versus state conflict, a government must be found in the defeated country that is able and willing to take responsibility for enforcing the peace terms on its own people. It must have sufficient legitimacy and authority to command the obedience of the people. Usually the harsher the peace terms, the more difficult this is to achieve. If no such government can be found, the victorious power will need to assume this responsibility itself and occupy the country with all the costs and hazards that this brings.”

different challenge. Here, the distinction is more ambiguous and the transition between the two conditions is more gradual. There may not be a government capable of “delivering” its population. Re-establishing control over the people falls to the intervening power, often in partnership with the indigenous government.⁷⁵

Coercive power is less relevant in this context and a greater premium is placed on the ability to win the allegiance of the people: to “capture their will” in Smith’s terms. Repressive regimes with effective coercive machinery may survive in the short term by using harsh measures to control a recalcitrant population as a substitute for legitimacy (which is discussed in greater detail below). But, as recent events in the Middle East have shown, this may not guarantee that they endure in the longer term in the contemporary media environment, where graphic images, news and ideas are communicated instantaneously to a mass audience empowering popular movements as never before.⁷⁶ Coercion is both potentially corrosive to a government’s legitimacy and it is also an inefficient method of control, being resource-intensive, time-consuming and often breeding resentment, merely fuelling a reciprocal cycle of violence. Moreover, procuring

⁷⁵ David M Edelstein, *Occupational Hazards*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), Pages 14–15. In his study of military occupations, Edelstein writes “Occupying powers have 3 types of strategies open to them: accommodation, inducement and coercion. Accommodation is a strategy of engaging and co-opting political elites within the occupied society who can control the nationalist instincts of the population...inducement attempts to gain the acquiescence of the occupied population by offering material benefits to the population....coercion employs military and police force...to defeat any nationalist opposition to the occupation.... An initially favourable threat environment allows states mostly to refrain from coercion and, instead, accommodate and induce the occupied population, which, in turn, reinforces a favourable threat environment and allows for progress towards the conditions that enable an occupation to end successfully...Successful occupying powers must meet 2 conditions before they withdraw. First, they must return sovereignty to an independent, indigenous, and reliable government. Simultaneously, they must ensure that the occupied territory is secure from threats both internal and external, but also non-threatening to its neighbours.”

⁷⁶ At the time of writing, the prognosis for “The Arab Spring” remains uncertain and it is a moot point whether representative political systems will take root and flourish. Context is key: Chinese behaviour in Tibet and the conduct of the North Korean regime towards its people provide examples of where coercion seems to work, without effective challenge. Although, even in the Chinese and North Korean cases there is a significant ideological component where the people are indoctrinated and thus mentally conditioned to obey. In some societies the ability to coerce is itself a source of legitimacy.

and maintaining the capabilities that give substance to hard power is expensive.⁷⁷ Self-evidently, actually applying force consumes more resources than merely threatening its use. Furthermore, its effect may only be localised and temporary. Control achieved through co-option, attraction and persuasion is more durable and cost-effective. In the present resource-straitened times, some nations increasingly favour soft power.⁷⁸ However, it is important to note that the possession of credible hard power capabilities, coupled with a reputation for being willing and professionally competent to use them effectively, is a significant factor in the ability to exert influence; and so it may underpin soft power.

It is better that people should obey not out of fear, but because they are persuaded it is the right thing to do, being ruled by their own conscience.⁷⁹ They are thus self-regulating.⁸⁰ The

⁷⁷ *House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts Major Projects Report 2010*, (HC 687, published 22 February 2011), Page 12. This is reflected in the UK Defence Budget settlement for 2010/11 of £36.9 billion (bn). Furthermore The House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts reported that the Ministry of Defence budget was forecast to be overspent by anywhere between £6 – 36 bn over 10 years. Of the 15 largest military projects considered in the Major Projects Report represent £67bn forecast spend. And between April 2009 – March 2010 the costs of these projects increased by £3.3bn, with the majority of these overrun costs concentrated in the Typhoon combat aircraft and Queen Elizabeth Class aircraft carrier projects.

⁷⁸ For example, the British Government has recently increased its overseas aid and development budget and anticipates a reduction in the defence budget. Furthermore, both the *National Security Strategy* (Cm 7953 dated October 2010) and the *Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR)* (Cm 7948 dated October 2010) indicate Her Majesty's Government intent to adopt a "whole of government" approach, to invest more in soft power and to endeavour to use this to tackle at root the causes of instability, nipping in the bud potential problems before they are fully developed and require the use of military force. Paragraph 4.B.2 of the SDSR states the intent to "Increase Official Development Assistance (ODA) to 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) by 2013...By using 30% of ODA to support fragile and conflict-affected states and tackle the drivers of instability we will help some of the poorest countries in the world address the root causes of their problems, build more responsible and accountable governments and strengthen security and justice overseas." It notes that approximately £1.9 bn (one fifth of the UK ODA spend) is currently devoted to fragile and conflict affected states. By increasing this to 30% of ODA it is assessed that spending on these activities could be doubled by 2014/15. However, achieving national security goals will likely require a judicious balance between hard and soft power.

⁷⁹ W Somerset Maugham, *The Moon and the Sixpence*, (London: Vintage Random House, 2008), Chapter 14. Maugham wrote: "conscience is the guardian in the individual of the rules which the community has evolved for its own protection. It is the policeman in our hearts set there to watch that we do not break its rules."

French Enlightenment philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, observed: “The stronger party is never strong enough to remain the master forever unless he transforms his strength into right and obedience into duty.”⁸¹ Therefore, we need to promote consent and bind people to our political agenda, if we wish it to endure. Heuser expresses this succinctly: “after vincere, there was convincere.”⁸² To defeat an opponent militarily (vincere) is not sufficient to secure our political goals; we must also convince his people and government to accept our terms (convincere). The concept of “influence” is central to the “convincere” function.⁸³ If one takes to its extreme, the logic of the Manoeuvrist Approach⁸⁴ (which advocates focusing on the minds of our opponents and those we seek to control), all activity is, to some degree, an influence operation; however, some means of influence may be more *kinetic* than others.⁸⁵

Sir Lawrence Freedman, Professor of War Studies at King’s College London, observes that constructing and communicating a compelling narrative is fundamentally important.⁸⁶ There

⁸⁰ This is not to advocate some Utopian crimeless society, where all citizens adhere fully to the Law. It is accepted, of course, that even in the most law-abiding society there will be those who transgress and so there will be a requirement for some sort of police force and judicial system to deter or punish infractions against the Law.

⁸¹ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourse on Political Economy and the Social Contract*, translated by Christopher Betts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Page 48.

⁸² Beatrice Heuser in *Clausewitz and the Twenty First Century*, edited by Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) Page 160.

⁸³ *The Influence Handbook*, UK Land Warfare Centre Publication, dated 26 Apr 2010.

⁸⁴ Joint Doctrine Publication (JDP) 0-01 (HMSO), Page 5-7.

⁸⁵ General Sir Frank Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), Page 282. “Violence may play a greater or lesser part in the [COIN] campaign, but it should be used very largely in support of ideas. In a conventional war the reverse is more usually the case and propaganda is deployed in support of armed might.”

⁸⁶ Professor Lawrence Freedman, “The Transformation of Strategic Affairs,” *Adelphi Paper 379*, IISS, Routledge, 2006, Page 22. Quoted also in Bart Schuurman, Master of Arts Thesis: “International Relations in Historical Perspective,” University of Utrecht, Supervisor: Dr. Isabelle Duyvesteyn, March 2009. Freedman defines a narrative as a compelling storyline which explains events in a manner structured to provoke a certain response and which can explain events convincingly. Opinions are shaped not so much by information received but the constructs through which that information is interpreted and understood.

are multiple constituencies to be convinced by our narrative.⁸⁷ In this endeavour, the narrative is “supported;” the carefully calibrated military and political activity required to promote it is “supporting.” Effective influence pre-supposes sophisticated understanding of our chosen *human terrain*; the pressure points and cues that shape their perceptions (albeit difficult when engaging with unfamiliar cultures). Therefore, high quality intelligence is at a premium to ensure that hard and soft effects are generated in an integrated and mutually reinforcing way. Developing the requisite understanding may demand significant investment of resources and – crucially – time.

Legitimacy

Legitimacy must feature prominently in any discussion about the modalities of achieving control and realising political outcomes. “Authority,” which is derived from legitimacy, implies a “right” to command obedience. This coexists with a reciprocal duty to obey by the ruled, acknowledging the right of the ruler to impose sanctions to enforce this. By contrast, coercion results in obedience given under duress. People generally obey authority out of respect whilst they obey coercion out of fear. The definition of legitimacy is not universal. What is understood by it is filtered through the prism of the particular political culture of the polity in question, be it an ancient tribal society or a sophisticated modern state.⁸⁸ Power, authority, legitimacy, control and coercion are closely linked. British historian David Charters judged that “implicit in the

Narratives are not ad hoc but carefully crafted, a powerful strategic tool for governments to explain their actions as being in accordance with the values and interests of their citizens. Winning the battle of the narratives is as challenging as it is important. Given the highly contested contemporary media environment, with its multiplicity of conflicting sources of information, our message will likely be distorted through prisms of pre-conceived ideas and cultural biases. It may not be received and understood exactly in the manner intended.

⁸⁷ These are principally: the indigenous population, regional actors, the international community and Western domestic audiences.

⁸⁸ Brian Redhead, *Plato to NATO: Studies in Political Thought*, (London: Penguin Books, 1995), Pages 9-17.

notion of legitimacy is the idea of control. If legitimacy represents the right to exercise authority, control represents the ability to do so.”⁸⁹ The greater the perceived legitimacy of any political act the less coercion required to implement it. Martha Finnemore observes astutely:

[t]he utility of force is a function of its legitimacy. Of course, one’s belief or disbelief, in the efficacy of a bullet has little to do with the effects the bullet has in one’s body. If one’s goal is simply to kill, then legitimacy and utility may be divorced. But simple killing is rarely the chief goal of political leaders who use force. Force is usually a means to some other end of social life, and attempts to use force alone for social control or social influence tend not to fare well over the long term. Force must be coupled with legitimacy for maximum effect. This coupling, in turn, has at least two dimensions: the goal being pursued must be seen to be legitimate and force must be viewed as a legitimate means to [achieve] that goal.⁹⁰

Appropriate and proportionate use of force is critical: action causing avoidable civilian casualties erodes the government’s legitimacy. Good intelligence is indispensable to enable precise kinetic targeting minimising the potential for *collateral damage*; it also generates insights informing prioritisation of consent-building stabilisation activity where it is most productive in promoting legitimacy and extending the government’s authority.

Society, whether it is a modern democracy or ancient tribal group, exists because people recognised they were more secure when acting collectively. Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau imagined this as the *Social Contract*. Instead of living in an uncertain and primitive state of nature, governed by the survival of the fittest, individuals chose to band together and regulate their behaviour. Suppressing instincts to pursue selfish interests at the expense of everyone else, individuals surrender their liberty to a sovereign given authority to rule, promote the general

⁸⁹ David Charters, *The British Army and the Jewish Insurgency*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1989), Page 3. Charters further observed that COIN, accordingly, could be considered to be a strategic battle for legitimacy and a tactical battle for control.

⁹⁰ Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention, Changing Beliefs About the Use of Force*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), Page 17.

good, adjudicate disputes and protect the citizens. In return, the citizen must meet certain civic obligations such as obeying laws and paying taxes.⁹¹

In any society, subjects have basic expectations of their rulers, encompassing spiritual and material needs, ranging from upholding the rule of law and ensuring political accountability within liberal democracies, to discharging more fundamental duties in less advanced societies, providing security in its widest sense.⁹² Satisfying these expectations legitimises the regime, underpinning its right to rule.⁹³ If the regime fails in this, their subjects may turn to other centres of power to meet their needs. Ultimately, they may overthrow the regime for not upholding its part of the Social Contract: invalidating its legitimacy to rule and releasing the people from their obligation to obey. Insurgency is evidence of contested legitimacy; consistent with Heuser's analysis, the government needs to "convince" its people of its authority to rule them.

Convincing the People – the Case for Stabilisation and Transition

The coercive nature of military force casts doubt on its suitability for Heuser's "convincere" function (for shorthand termed stabilisation here) but the military contribution is to create a sufficiently permissive environment (if not realistically a "safe and secure environment") for civilian agencies to operate. It is a symbiotic relationship: sufficient security enables

⁹¹ Brian Redhead, introducer, *Plato to NATO: Studies in Political Thought*, (London: Penguin Books, 1995), Pages 96 – 134.

⁹² This may involve , delivering justice and resolving disputes, providing access to employment, ensuring the fair distribution of land and security of its tenure, the promotion of stable economic conditions, and the provision of basic amenities like food, medicines, electricity and water supply.

⁹³ Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Pages 3-4. Ghani and Lockhart introduce the concept of the "Sovereignty Gap" which exists between the de jure status of sovereignty accorded to some states in the International System and the de facto ability of such states to minister adequately to the needs of their people. Without proper provision of services to their people to substantiate and justify their status of "sovereign state," sovereignty can be little more than a veneer. In order to create stable, politically self-sustaining and prosperous states, this "Sovereignty Gap" must be closed by state-building and stabilisation activity.

stabilisation activity, which in turn promotes improved security. There may be a period of grace early in an occupation when the population is temporarily subdued. If the intervention force establishes its authority/legitimacy at this critical juncture it is axiomatic that the prospects of achieving control over the population are improved.⁹⁴

As experts, civilian agencies are best suited to conducting stabilisation activities and the civil authority should lead in directing all lines of operation.⁹⁵ Initially, the situation may not be sufficiently permissive for civilian agencies to operate freely. Arguably, and cognisant that it falls outside its core activities, the military should develop a “survival-level” stabilisation capability to hold the ring until civilian agencies arrive.”⁹⁶ It could only be a temporary expedient but it would meet the basic needs of the people and guarantee essential services to prevent a vacuum of security developing which could lead to unrest and alienation of popular support.

In the competition for control of the people, insurgents arguably have an advantage over the government being limited only by the Laws of Physics and their own pragmatism in using violence. If it suits their interests, and they can penetrate the government’s protective cordon,

⁹⁴ The executive summary of the Brahimi Report, commissioned by the UN Secretary General, into the future of UN Peacekeeping operations, concluded that: “The first 6 to 12 weeks following a cease-fire or peace accord are often the most critical ones for establishing both a stable peace and the credibility of a new operation. Opportunities lost during that period are hard to regain.” The Brahimi Report submitted to the UN Secretary General on 17 August 2000. http://www.un.org/peace/reports/peace_operations/ (Accessed 9 Feb 12).

⁹⁵ *UK Joint Doctrine Note 4/05, The Comprehensive Approach*, (HMSO, 2006). This is also referred to as a “whole of government” approach in the UK National Security Strategy and the Strategic Defence and Security Review White Paper published in October 2010.

⁹⁶ General Anthony Zinni USMC (Retired), “Understanding what Victory is,” *Forum 2003, Proceedings of the US Navy Institute* 129. The former commander of US Central Command, General Anthony Zinni, ponders this, asking: “What is the role of the military beyond killing people and breaking things...we have to ask ourselves now if there is something the military needs to change into that involves movement into the area of political, economic and information management. If those wearing suits cannot come in and solve the problem – i.e. cannot bring the expertise, resources and organisation – and the military is going to continue to get stuck with it, you have two choices. Either the civilian officials must develop the capabilities demanded of them and learn how to partner with other agencies to get the job done, or the military finally needs to change into something else beyond the breaking and killing.”

they can terrorise the people to enforce compliance.⁹⁷ The government needs to secure the active support of the people, whereas the insurgent must simply deny this to the government. If they feel vulnerable, people are unlikely openly to oppose the insurgents, or support the government; at best they are likely to be uneasily neutral. Security forces must protect the people with a high degree of assurance on a continuous basis. This is resource-intensive and time-consuming - as shown by Coalition *Clear-Hold-Build* operations in Iraq during *The Surge* in 2007/08. These operations involve forcing out insurgents from the objective area then emplacing a cordon sanitaire to prevent re-infiltration. Stabilisation activity is conducted in parallel to minister to the people's wider security needs.⁹⁸ Political negotiations with local power structures and wider engagement with the people prepare the ground. These complementary activities aim to extend the government's writ, enhancing its legitimacy and encouraging the people to reject the insurgent agenda. The ultimate aim is to restore the government's control of its population, securing their loyalty and creating enduring political stability, so allowing the intervening entity to reduce its commitment and transfer full responsibility to the indigenous government.

Transition and Transformation (T2)

Transition is the process whereby an intervening entity transfers power to an indigenous government. A carefully modulated transition is often an essential precondition for a successful exit strategy. Transformation improves the capacity of the indigenous government and its security forces in readiness for transition. Transformation can encompass all aspects of state-building such

⁹⁷General Sir Frank Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), Page 283. Successful coercion depends upon access of the coercer to his target, hence the imperative in contemporary Western COIN doctrine to protect the people. Although coercive power may attenuate as the distance grows between the coercer and the object of his coercion, it has residual effect if it is believed the coercer could return to punish transgressions. As Kitson observed: "It is fatally easy to underestimate the ability of a small number of armed men to exact support from exposed sections of the population by threats."

⁹⁸ This may include access to basic services, such as health and education; good governance and justice, most particularly in the resolution of disputes; the creation of conditions that promote prosperity.

as judicial reform, governance and economic development. T2 is a process, not an event.

Insurgency is a contest for the allegiance of the people between the established government and those seeking to supplant it - a quintessentially political problem; the indigenous government is best placed to resolve the fundamental contest of loyalty at its heart. If the desired political end-state is in any way transformative – seeking to transplant Western liberal values – statesmen should consider carefully the ambition of their political agenda and its compatibility with the existing political culture of its destination.⁹⁹ Reality may fall short of aspiration. Recognising what is realistically achievable and settling for it as an improvement, and an acceptable outcome, albeit sub-optimal, may be the best approach. Western values are not universal; idealism should be tempered by *realpolitik*.¹⁰⁰ A former commander of US forces in Afghanistan observed the British ruled India effectively with relatively few administrators because they worked “with the forces in society not against them.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Democracy is a delicate plant not suited to every political soil. In polities with no tradition of democracy, it might be a more realistic proposition to aim for some sort of representative government that takes account of the existing indigenous cultures and traditions, which might then be self-sustaining. The political unrest in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Bahrain and Jordan in early 2011 and the varying responses of the respective regimes to their people’s broad aspirations for “democracy” suggests the important influence of the existing political culture and traditions in shaping how “democracy” might manifest itself in its specific local context. President Obama’s Cairo Speech in June 2009 addresses this phenomenon. In considering democracy, he said “...So let me be clear: no system of government can or should be imposed upon one nation by any other. That does not lessen my commitment, however, to governments that reflect the will of the people. Each nation gives life to this principle in its own way, grounded in the traditions of its own people...” <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/04/us/politics/04obama.text.html?pagewanted=all> (Accessed 20 February 2012).

¹⁰⁰ Robert Mandel, *The Meaning of Military Victory*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2006), Page 120. “The West generally assumes its rules set are universal, and either projects in a misleading way this rule-set onto others (interpreting other’s behaviour in terms of its own rules) or attempts to impose directly its rule-set onto others and induce compliance. Indeed, the recent pattern of wars initiated by Western states seems predicated on the assumption that the people within the attacked states all embrace Western ideals about post war outcomes. The results here are often resentment, misunderstanding, and largely ineffective international initiatives, including strategic victory.”

¹⁰¹ US Lieutenant General Vines, Bagram Airbase, September 2003, Afghanistan. See also Niall Ferguson, *Empire, How Britain Made the World*, (London: Penguin Books, 2004), Page 184. Ferguson

Time is a key factor. Self-evidently, unless intervention forces intend to establish a permanent dominion, they must withdraw at some point. As General Petraeus observed in Iraq in 2007, “every occupation has a half-life.”¹⁰² However, political and social transformation is not a short-term project; it takes time to mature. Unhelpfully, the interested parties may have differing time horizons and this can be a source of tension. As an indigenous government’s appetite for sovereignty grows, tolerance of Western forces and consent for their activity will likely diminish. Even if they were originally welcomed as “liberators,” nationalist sentiment may agitate for their withdrawal; religious tensions may exacerbate this.¹⁰³ Furthermore, Western politicians and their domestic voters may not tolerate the costs of an extended commitment, which runs beyond the horizon of their electoral cycle. Risks and compromises may thus have to be accepted in the transition of power.¹⁰⁴ The intervening power’s leverage will be commensurate with its perceived value to the indigenous government’s survival: the greater the threat, the greater its influence.

similarly cites the example of the British Raj in India as a classic case of an occupying power ruling by co-opting rather than coercing the indigenous people; it proved remarkably efficient and cost effective. At the apex of the bureaucratic system was the “Covenanted” Indian Civil Service, composed of British officials selected by competitive examination; this elect group was also referred to as the “heaven born.” It was supported by a much larger and subordinate group of native Indian civil servants, in multiple layers. Ferguson says that it is perhaps baffling that between 1858 and 1947 there were never more than 1000 members of the Covenanted Civil Service in India at any one time, yet it presided over the administration of a population that reached a total of over 400 million souls by the end of British rule.

¹⁰² General David Petraeus, Commander Multinational Force Iraq, 2007.

¹⁰³ Specifically, tensions caused by the presence of Western Christian soldiers deployed in Moslem countries.

¹⁰⁴ Military forces are a highly visible and tangible expression of a state’s involvement in a particular mission. Indeed, the presence of deployed forces may be synonymous in the mind of the public and the media with the overall national effort. However, social and political transformation is not a military role. It emphatically falls to other instruments of power and can involve a wide spectrum of government agencies, private institutions and NGOs. Less conspicuous and perhaps less expensive than a wide-scale military deployment, (and thus below the threshold for intense media scrutiny) a civilian-led stabilisation effort may be able to be sustained more easily in the long term.

However, once the timetable for withdrawal is known, its legitimacy and relevance may decline, potentially diminishing the control it can exert.¹⁰⁵

Any settlement, if it is to last, must acknowledge the interests of neighbouring powers, who are permanent fixtures, with enduring interests; whereas the intervening force is transient.¹⁰⁶ For example, capacity building to enhance indigenous capability, although essential to combat the insurgency, could be seen as threatening by its neighbours.¹⁰⁷ Many insurgencies are proxy wars where states use clients to pursue their interests vicariously.¹⁰⁸ A regional power may wish to keep a neighbour weak; or see strategic gain in trapping the fingers of an intervening power in the mangle of insurgency. Such threats must be neutralised, albeit perhaps, by diplomatic and economic rather than military means.

Indigenous politicians may declare their enthusiasm to assume power, but oversell their readiness to do so, lacking the necessary skill, or depth of political support, to be effective. A graduated handover may be required where the occupying power retains an *overwatch* capability as an insurance policy, ready to intervene to stabilise the situation. This brings political risk.

¹⁰⁵ Ian F W Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), Page 153. This was the British experience in Aden, where once it was clear that the British intended to withdraw, they found it increasingly difficult to gain traction in the indigenous political process or to gain intelligence sources. Ian Beckett observes: “On 22 February 1966, the Wilson Government’s Defence White Paper indicated that, as part of the general reduction in British defence expenditure, the base at Aden would not be retained after South Arabian independence. This undermined at a stroke not only the federal authorities but also the whole of the counter-insurgency effort.” This may have resonance for contemporary conflicts where insurgents believe they have the strategic patience to outlast the West in cases of wars of choice.

¹⁰⁶ For example, Pakistan has a strong vested interest in the future of Afghanistan believing it provides strategic depth in the face of the perceived threat from India; and Iran has interests in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

¹⁰⁷ There is also the political risk that such a force might be used inappropriately as a tool of the central government to repress its own civilian population.

¹⁰⁸ They may provide clients with a variety of support including: sanctuary, recruits, intelligence, training, arms and materiel. Examples include Angola 1975 – 1991; Cambodia 1975 – 79; and Guatemala 1966 – 1984.

Although the occupying power may have transferred de jure authority for security, it will (by its continuing presence) likely still retain de facto moral responsibility in the eyes of its own domestic public and the international community. Its reputation can be tarnished by association if the indigenous forces' conduct falls below acceptable Western standards, even if it remains within the tolerance of local norms.¹⁰⁹

A key challenge for any *overwatch* force is maintaining situational awareness. Transition is likely to result in a reducing profile and presence. The ability to collect Human Intelligence (HUMINT) may be diminished by the resulting lack of interaction with the population; technical means of collection may also be affected, leading to deteriorating “understanding” of the area of operations.¹¹⁰ This may be as basic as vehicle drivers losing familiarity with routes and physical terrain; or more profound with commanders losing their “feel” for the “human terrain.”¹¹¹ Maintaining situational awareness at this critical juncture is essential; it is a period of high risk. How the transfer of responsibility is handled - and critically how it is perceived to be handled - is seminally important in the campaign narrative. A bungled handover, or one trumpeted as such by the world's media, can undo years of good progress getting to this point.¹¹² Reputational damage

¹⁰⁹ This was demonstrated by the furore caused by the “Wikileaks” exposure in October 2010 of a multitude of MNF “SigAct” reports, dating back to 2004, that seem to indicate that US Forces were aware that Iraqi Forces were involved in abusing prisoners but were directed not to investigate further or and intervene to stop this. Whatever the truth or otherwise of these allegations, they generated intense media and “blogging” interest which ensured the story proliferated widely. This tarnished both the GoI and the Coalition reputation.

¹¹⁰ *JDP 3-40, Security and Stabilisation: the Military Contribution*, (HMSO, 2010) Paragraph 1141. This is referred to as “campaign blindness” and an “intelligence void” in UK doctrine.

¹¹¹ This may result from reduced key leadership engagement (KLE) activity as well as interaction with ordinary people on the streets.

¹¹² In the summer of 2006, British Forces handed over Camp Abu Naji in Maysaan Province in Southern Iraq to the Iraqi Army. Despite careful planning and coordination, this did not run smoothly. Once the British Forces had vacated the camp, the Iraqi Army proved unable to maintain security and militia fighters broke in to burn and loot. Dramatic images proliferated across the media; it was a conspicuous information operations failure. Hard lessons were learnt and were applied during Operation ZENITH

could result in diminished influence on the international stage. Whilst Western political instincts might be to drawdown forces quickly, it is imperative to retain adequate ISR capabilities to support the *overwatch* force. More, not less, *find* and *understand* capability is required during this vulnerable period.

Paradoxical logic might overshadow any decision to re-intervene. Early committal of the *overwatch* force might nip any problem in the bud before it had properly developed. However, its committal could be portrayed as evidence of a regression in the campaign and that transition had in some way failed (damaging politically if the narrative is one of unrelenting progress towards the “exit” and “success”). Re-intervention may be challenging. When contingency planning for this in Basra in 2007, commanders and staff realised the scope of any mission would be limited and it would, given anticipated force levels, have to be conducted as a raid. It would be difficult to hold or dominate ground for a protracted period; casualty evacuation and other logistic constraints militated against it. The routes into Basra City were predictable and easily blocked with improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Access would require a deliberate break-in battle through what many commanders likened to a “medium density minefield.” Having handed over their bases to the Iraqi Army, the *overwatch* force would not have the mutual support they previously enjoyed from British armoured forces once occupying these “hard shoulders,” around which they could manoeuvre. Therefore, even once entry had been forced, tactical options for the force would be limited.

Training and equipping indigenous forces to the requisite standard to master the security challenges is fundamental to successful transition. Capacity building must be holistic and

which, accordingly, was conducted as a deliberate relief in place, with Iraqi Army units living alongside the British units they were to replace for a period of time before the British withdrew. This ensured that the operation was conducted smoothly and there was no repeat of the scenes witnessed at Camp Abu Naji.

comprehend all of the Defence Lines of Development¹¹³ to deliver a robust capability. Defining the level of competence required is critical: how far should it approximate to Western standards, or should it simply be “Afghan or Iraqi good enough?” Difficult decisions exist about how far to embed in, or partner with, indigenous forces. Experience from Iraq and Afghanistan seems to indicate that the closer and deeper the partnership between the forces, and the greater the sharing of operational risk and responsibility, the better the results. However, there are genuine force protection risks. Renegade indigenous soldiers have sometimes turned against their coalition mentors, killing and wounding them. Although these tragic episodes are statistically rare, measured against the overall scale of the partnering and mentoring effort, they erode trust - an indispensable commodity when fighting together. Such events sow doubt and can undermine support at home for the mission. Other challenges include constraints on the effective sharing of intelligence; and the provision of essential enabling capabilities. Indigenous forces are unlikely to have the sophisticated array of intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets; force protection (perhaps most notably counter-improvised explosive device (C-IED) capabilities and protected tactical mobility); aviation and air support; fires; medical evacuation and other logistic support routinely enjoyed by Western forces. The question then is the degree of risk acceptable for coalition soldiers to bear whilst mentoring/partnering. Coalition forces may have to invest significant resources to provide the requisite enablers.

Where a multilateral grouping effects transition, friction may result from the different political imperatives of contributing nations, manifested in varying degrees of political risk each

¹¹³ UK *Joint Doctrine Publication (JDP) 0-01, British Defence Doctrine*, (HMSO, 3rd Edition, August 2008), Page 4-4. Defence Lines of Development (DLOD) represent a conceptual methodology that ensures that elements of Defence capability are developed in a coherent and holistic manner. The DLODs are: Training; Equipment; Information; Personnel; Concepts and Doctrine; Organisation; Infrastructure; Logistics; Interoperability (Overarching Theme).

will bear and in their timetable for withdrawal.¹¹⁴ Some areas of operations (AO) will be more benign than others, tempting some nations towards faster transition. Furthermore, the decision to draw down forces and end a deployment may be influenced as much by domestic political considerations as it is by the situation on the ground. Telegenic images of troops returning home convey a powerful impression of “mission accomplished,” with political kudos accruing to the leader responsible for it.¹¹⁵ As General Petraeus observed, there were many different clocks operating in Iraq during 2007/08. The US clock was showing a different time from the UK’s clock, which was different again from the clock of the Iraqi polity in Basra, itself running faster than Prime Minister Maliki’s clock in Baghdad.

The threshold for re-intervention may also be interpreted differently, potentially causing tension at the tactical level and threatening coalition cohesion. In December 2007 Basra was granted Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) status, where Iraqi de facto primacy for security was translated into de jure authority for it. Thenceforward, the MND(SE) forces were legally in *overwatch*. There were strict limits governing the ability of these MNF forces to “re-intervene” in Basra. This could be done in self-defence where the provocation was strong enough; or at the formal request of the Government of Iraq. The British Government set the threshold for re-intervention higher than that recognised by the US in provinces that were under US *overwatch*.

¹¹⁴ Edward Cody and Karen DeYoung, “France will speed up troop withdrawal from Afghanistan by one year”, *Washington Post*, 27 January 2012. President Sarkozy announced his decision at a press conference with Afghan President Karzai to withdraw French forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2013, a year ahead of the agreed NATO timetable. This followed the killing of 4 French soldiers and the wounding of several others by a rogue Afghan National Army soldier.
http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/france-will-speed-up-troop-withdrawal-from-afghanistan-by-one-year/2012/01/27/gIQAhc49VQ_story.html (Accessed 9 Feb 12).

¹¹⁵ An assumption that the withdrawal of forces equates to the end of the stabilisation mission is erroneous. Nonetheless, some may take the high-profile withdrawal of forces as a metric of success. Because of this, where there is a need to demonstrate “success” there may be a temptation to draw down force levels before the actual conditions on the ground warrant this.

The UK required a prime ministerial request to initiate re-intervention. US conditions were not so stringent and were thus more flexible. This differential between UK and US tolerances was potentially a source of friction.

It should not surprise if indigenous politicians exercise power in a different way from that anticipated by those relinquishing it. Beholden to their own networks and vested interests, they may be subject to cultural dynamics opaque to Western sensibilities. Their political calculus may not compute easily to those versed in Western liberal democratic values. Practices considered “corrupt” in the West may be accepted as routine lubrication of the wheels of power. Indigenous governments will exercise sovereignty according to their norms. This may be frustrating, but it is probably unavoidable. TE Lawrence advised: “Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not win it for them.”¹¹⁶

Lawrence’s advice is surely still right, but the degree of political, legal and operational risk associated with such an approach in the present day is fundamentally different from that which obtained in Arabia in 1917. Room for error is much reduced in the contemporary media glare. Perceived infractions by indigenous political elites the West supports can undermine the moral justification for the campaign in the minds of Western electorates.¹¹⁷ Although the intervening power might aspire to shape the political behaviour of its indigenous partner, recent experience suggests this can be difficult. Indigenous politicians may work around the intent of their Western partners, or even actively oppose it, especially where to do so could earn political capital. Such

¹¹⁶ T E Lawrence, “27 Articles,” *The Arab Bulletin*, 20 August 1917.

¹¹⁷ “Obama seeks Karzai Assurances on Corruption Push, Taliban Plan,” Bloomberg Business Weekly 11 Oct 2010. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-05-11/obama-seeks-assurances-from-karzai-on-afghan-corruption-push-taliban-plan.html> (Accessed 9 Feb 12.) “Brown Warns Karzai on Corruption,” BBC News website 6 Nov 2009. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8345535.stm> (Accessed 9 Feb 12).

posturing is particularly frustrating when conducted by government politicians whose authority the occupying force is bolstering, and who in private might express full support.¹¹⁸

Reconciliation and Reintegration (R2)

Professor Howard's most important stipulation for war to be decisive is to find a government with sufficient control over its people to ensure they abide by the terms of the peace settlement. This is challenging in COIN where the government's authority and control is contested and a settlement has yet to be determined. Unpalatable though it might be, there will likely be a need to open a dialogue with the enemy to draw them into the conflict termination and resolution process: reconciliation and reintegration (R2). Best done from a position of strength, it may be necessary first to inflict sufficient damage and pain on the insurgents to force them, chastened, to negotiate on terms most favourable to the government. A key issue is how far the intervening powers should participate directly in R2 and how far they should simply facilitate indigenous government dialogue with insurgent leaders.

R2 will generally aim to separate the reconcilable elements of the enemy from the irreconcilables, drawing the former into the political process. Charismatic leaders, able to convince their followers to embrace the process, will be valuable. By giving them a stake in the future political settlement we hope to build a sustainable peace and anchor their loyalties to the state. Not all insurgents will be reconcilable. Intractable elements will need to be killed or

¹¹⁸ Matthew Green, "Karzai condemns US-Russia Raid on Heroin Labs," FT.com, posted at 21.18 hours, 30th October 2010. A possible example is President Karzai's public condemnation of a joint US/Russian counter-narcotics operation conducted on 28 October 2010 in Eastern Afghanistan. Although Afghan forces participated in the raid, Karzai claimed that he had not been notified in advance; his office issued a statement expressing his displeasure: "While Afghanistan remains committed to its joint efforts with [the] international community against narcotics, it also makes it clear that no organisation or institution shall have the right to carry out such a military operation without prior authorisation and consent of the Government of Afghanistan." Perceived infringements of sovereignty are an extremely sensitive matter. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/db45b274-e460-11df-910c-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1lvgykSQ> (Accessed 9 Feb 12).

captured.¹¹⁹ Recent experience in Iraq indicates that R2 can deliver success, but may involve pragmatic compromises and distasteful decisions that sit uneasily with Western democratic norms. Some negotiations will be conducted covertly, perhaps with people with “blood on their hands,” responsible for attacks against security forces or civilians.¹²⁰ The rationale for some decisions, essential though they may be to progress the reconciliation process, may be difficult to explain to Western populations. A sometimes controversial but ultimately necessary activity, R2 involves varying degrees of political, reputational, legal and military risk.

Brigadier Sandy Storrie, who commanded the British 7th Armoured Brigade in Basra, has produced an interesting comparative analysis of British R2 efforts in Basra in 2007/08 and US efforts in Anbar Province over roughly the same period; it deserves notice.¹²¹ The language used to explain the respective UK and US initiatives bears closer examination. The US applied a positive label, “The Awakening,” with optimistic connotations of revival and the sense that “the people were doing it for themselves.” The British initiative had an altogether more ambivalent label, “The Accommodation” with connotations of appeasement. Worse still, it was also referred to as “The Deal,” conjuring up numerous shady inferences; not only weak, but perfidious too. Yet there were many similarities between the two initiatives; both carried risk and were pragmatic

¹¹⁹ General Sir Frank Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), Page 283. Whilst excessive violence is counter-productive, some force will need to be applied within appropriate rules of engagement to kill or capture insurgents (particularly the irreconcilable elements) as part of the security campaign to protect the people. This is unavoidable. As the experienced COIN commander, General Sir Frank Kitson observed: “The first thing that must be apparent when contemplating the sort of action which a government facing insurgency should take, is that there can be no such thing as a purely military solution because insurgency is not primarily a military activity. At the same time there is no such thing as a wholly political solution either, short of surrender, because the very fact that a state of insurgency exists implies that violence is involved which will have to be countered to some extent at least by the use of force.”

¹²⁰ This was the case with the JAM interlocutor with whom the British came to an accommodation in Basra.

¹²¹ Brigadier A J Storrie, “Talking to the Enemy – Informal Conflict Termination in Iraq,” *British Army Review*, (February 2010).

expedients to clarify indigenous identities to harness the power of Iraqi nationalism and turn it against external threats to the Iraqi state. Language matters in shaping perceptions of such sensitive issues.

Basra – an Illustration of Complexity

Complex and fraught with risk, being buffeted by the vicissitudes of indigenous political, socio-economic and cultural influences, transition will not necessarily follow a neat linear progression. British experience in Iraq provides a salutary perspective on the limitations of force. The events in Basra graphically illustrate just how difficult it is to understand, let alone to manipulate or influence with armed force, indigenous political dynamics. Western military force is a blunt instrument with limited effectiveness in such circumstances.¹²²

In 2007 Iraq was still re-building itself after the dismantling of its official organs of state by Saddam and then the Coalition. It was happening from the bottom up, consistent with Arab cultural dynamics, whereby loyalty is to blood not institutions; it goes from the inside out and official/state allegiances attract the weakest loyalty. In a fractured society militias were potentially a cohering force: every militia had its political party (not vice versa), and also its violent wing, forming a three layered polity of the state institutions (the official state), and the militias split between their social organisations (the shadow state) and their violent henchmen (the dark state). Understanding these official/shadow/dark dynamics was key to plotting a way forward.¹²³

¹²² Elements of the analysis in this section were first published in *The British Army Review* February 2010 edition. It is derived from first-hand experience of the author.

¹²³ The HQ MND(SE) analysis in early 2007 of the cultural, social and political dynamics at play in its Area of Operations owes much to the scholarship of Professor Charles Tripp and Mark Allen. Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Mark Allen, *Arabs*, (London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, 2006).

The Shia-dominated Government of Iraq (GoI) was riven by factional struggles, with Prime Minister Maliki at that time weak, juggling allegiances and cutting deals to stay in power, and hence unable to stand up to the powerful militias: JAM and Badr.¹²⁴ This had particular relevance for MND(SE) with an essentially Shia area of operations (AO); internal GoI power politics played here out on a daily basis. Multiple Baswari sources of influence were represented in Baghdad, making every MND(SE) operation a political hazard, limiting what could be achieved by military means. Basra's shattered polity was dysfunctional. Governor Wahili had marginal legitimacy, lacking the support of the people or even of his council. Although the GoI denied his legal status as Governor, it seemed constitutionally unable to remove him, thereby creating a political impasse with an embattled figure concerned with his own enrichment and political survival. He was emblematic of Shia political ineptitude and inability to tackle its shadow and dark states, in which Wahili had considerable "wasta."¹²⁵ Compounding this, the Provincial Council refused official contact with HQ MND(SE) following the destruction of the Jamee' at¹²⁶ over Christmas 2006 in an attempt to root out the "death squads" active amongst the Basra Serious Crimes Unit (SCU) – a GoI police force.¹²⁷ It was challenging to see how Coalition military force could be applied meaningfully to support political progress.

One operation exemplifies this. During a joint Iraqi/Coalition strike against an individual authorised for arrest, new intelligence revealed a further target in an Iraqi police HQ/jail. The

¹²⁴ The militia of the Shia political party The Supreme Council for the Islamic Republic of Iraq (SCIRI), later renamed in 2007 as The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI).

¹²⁵ An Arabic term applied to an individual who has influence, credibility, prestige, and charisma – the power to get things done.

¹²⁶ The HQ of the Iraqi Serious Crimes Unit (SCU) – ironically named since some of its members were suspected of committing, rather than solving, serious crimes.

¹²⁷ Agreement to this destruction was given by the Basra Provincial Council security chiefs in advance but was reneged on afterwards in the light of the local, JAM-orchestrated, uproar.

strike force exploited onto this new objective but arrived just too late and their quarry eluded capture. During the search, Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) reportedly found two Iraqi policemen behaving less than honourably towards a female inmate and a scuffle seems to have broken out between ISOF members and the policemen, who were allegedly beaten up. During the search some prisoners escaped. Responsibility for this was disputed, but some Iraqi officials expediently chose to assume MNF/ISOF culpable. The fallout from the raid was significant. The hazard to foreign forces operating in a political culture they do not understand was underlined. That the strike force targeted the police HQ, a GoI institution, and forced entry into it, was considered a violation of Iraqi sovereignty.¹²⁸ Angry at this affront, the provincial council refused to “re-engage” with MND(SE).¹²⁹ The HQ that was raided belonged to the National Information and Intelligence Agency (NIIA), which some observers speculated was the personal fiefdom of a senior member of the GoI who would have taken particular umbrage at the violation of sovereignty; this might explain the extreme reaction to it.

The GoI curtailed ISOF operations.¹³⁰ Even more rigorous target clearance procedures were introduced; several operations had to be approved by Prime Minister Maliki’s office, having been first routed through Corps HQ and General Petraeus’s staff; some were vetoed. Subsequent operational planning re-emphasised the primacy of the political line of operation (LOO). Even if

¹²⁸ That this was an operation against an approved target, conducted jointly by Multinational Forces and ISOF, cleared by Baghdad, and that it uncovered despicable behaviour by Iraqi Police, seemed not to count.

¹²⁹ Ironically, the Basra Provincial Council was due to have restored formal engagement with MND(SE) on the day following the raid. Their refusal to do so prolonged the political paralysis in Basra.

¹³⁰ Following the raid, ISOF were subject to an investigation and were banned from operating in Basra for 6 weeks, such was the high dudgeon in Baghdad. According to a US Special Operations Forces officer mentoring ISOF, one Arabic phrase used to describe ISOF apparently had two meanings depending on the inflection used by the speaker. One nuance was that it meant “special forces” and the other meant “dirty forces.” When ISOF conducted strike operations against Sunni targets, they were invariably described as “special forces” but when they went against Shia targets, they were “dirty forces.”

a particular individual was identified by intelligence to be an imperative threat to security, and thus designated as a legitimate target for arrest, the political ramifications of an arrest operation were carefully weighed. If it might provoke an adverse reaction which could disrupt the political process, then risk might be taken against force protection rather than against the political LOO.

Divided loyalty permeated the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). MND(SE) supported 10 Iraqi Army (IA) Division which, by its own admission, was riddled with militia sympathisers; its rank and file came from the same communities as the militias and were their kith and kin. Sharing intelligence was impossible, detention operations were curtailed and the ISF was reluctant to conduct joint Coalition/ISF patrols.¹³¹ Coalition presence drew fire onto the ISF; and the image of the ISF as the puppets of the ‘occupying’ Coalition undermined their attempts to be seen as the legitimate expression of Iraqi/GoI nationalism. General Jalil, the Police Chief, observed: “[the problem] is not about training or equipment, it’s about loyalty – and MNF can’t touch that.”¹³² Loyalty remained something only the Shia polity, in Baghdad as much as in Basra, could resolve.

In the US AO the security problem was clear: the existential threat was (Sunni) Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQ-I). The target of violence there was largely the opposing sectarian population. *The Surge* of additional US troops was a valid response to a war between opposed peoples; there was a population to protect. It was not clear this logic applied in Basra where the problem was one of identity and loyalty rooted deep within the Shia polity; there was a growing realisation that Coalition forces were more part of the problem than the solution. Increasingly seen as “occupiers,” the MNF was running out of legitimacy and time, as consent for its presence

¹³¹ In contrast, UK troops did embed successfully with 10 (IA) Division battalions when they deployed to Baghdad: the Sunni opposition clarified Shia loyalties and allowed UK mentors to be seen as welcome allies against a common foe.

¹³² Basra Police Chief, Major General Jalil, discussion with General Officer Commanding MND(SE) May 2007.

diminished. HQMND(SE) estimated that 80 - 85% of the violence in Basra was directed against MNF, with the residual violence between competing Shia entities being centred on control of economic resources.¹³³

Intra-Shia violence seemed self-limiting: fear of a Sunni revival restricted the damage the Shia factions would inflict on each other. The goal was a self-sustaining independent Iraqi polity, free of MNF tutelage. Christian troops, with their distorting influence on Iraqi loyalties, seemed increasingly inappropriate as the answer to Basra's problems. In any case, a British "surge" was not an option.¹³⁴ UK domestic public opinion was increasingly skeptical about involvement in Iraq. Another way had to be found to deliver an outcome all could validly claim was 'success'. By autumn 2006, the UK had decided that transition in MND(SE) was in the best interests of campaign progress.

There was thus convergence between declining political support for the Iraq operation and rising appetite for the Afghan campaign. The UK could not do both properly. Transition leading to reduced UK force levels in Iraq would enable an increase in Afghanistan.¹³⁵ Accordingly, throughout 2007, under the auspices of Operation ZENITH, MND(SE) re-postured to the Contingency Operating Base (COB) at Basra Air Station outside Basra City.¹³⁶ Endorsed by the

¹³³ This residual violence was more characteristic of gangsterism than insurgency. Unlike in the US AO, where AQ-I violence was nihilistic, the energy infrastructure in the south was largely untouched – Shia groups were competing for a bigger slice of the economic cake; they did not want to stamp on the cake itself.

¹³⁴ The small UK theatre reserve had already been committed.

¹³⁵ Judgment whether the neat intersection between the achievement of propitious conditions for drawdown in Iraq, and the timetable for troop increases in Afghanistan, was authentic, serendipitous or contrived, is a matter of perspective.

¹³⁶ Under Operation ZENITH, MND(SE) forces handed over bases in a relief-in-place with the Iraqi Security Forces, in an orderly and largely uncontested manner, and re-postured to the Contingency Operating Base (COB). In part, Operation ZENITH was conceived with a moral forcing function, to leave a security gap the ISF would have to fill, so reducing Iraqi dependence by forcing them to confront their internal political and hence security issues.

US-led Multinational Corps–Iraq (MNC-I), its execution was substantially underwritten by Corps resources (it simply could not have happened without US agreement and support). Although authorised by MNC-I, there was potential for tension since the US trajectory was to reinforce through *The Surge*; whereas, UK was reducing its forces.

The operation was complemented by the arrival of a new security “supremo,” General Mohan, in Basra - seemingly the long-awaited Iraqi *deus-ex-machina*. Finally, there was someone HQ MND(SE) believed it could trust to deliver progress.¹³⁷ Mohan began a process of widespread political engagement. His goal, shared by MND(SE), was to cohere the factions around the unifying draws of Basra’s latent wealth, its fear of Iran, its desire for self-government and its fear of a Sunni revival. He recognised the presence of MNF in Basra not only provoked violence but was also used to justify it: it distorted local loyalties by allowing the militias to mobilise popular support under the banner of resistance to MNF “occupation.” Accordingly, the removal of British troops was expected to reduce violence to levels Mohan felt the ISF could handle. Therefore, Mohan endorsed Operation ZENITH. Nevertheless, he recognised the Coalition’s continuing worth as the ultimate big stick, so necessary in the Iraqi political tradition, to be called on in extremis, which the ISF could not yet be trusted to supply.

Coincident with Mohan’s arrival, an interlocutor in JAM was found who offered to contribute to GoI, UK and hence US goals, by taking the majority of the violent opposition to MNF out of the fight. This promised to support Mohan’s intent and to de-risk Operation ZENITH’s re-posturing of forces. The interlocutor and many of his followers were in the COB detention centre, giving the Division leverage over him. Importantly, for the prospects of an Iraqi-

¹³⁷ Subsequently the relationship between the British and Mohan become more difficult and less productive. But the perspective of HQ MND(SE) in summer 2007 was that Mohan represented the best chance to deliver political progress. Perhaps the bleak context of 2007 encouraged overly optimistic expectations that Mohan could not live up to.

led end-state, he was a known anti-Iranian with a strong following within JAM, who appeared to share the same aspirations for Basra as the MNF and GoI - increased development, prosperity, education, religious moderation, and Iraqi control. His motivation for attacking MNF was that they were “occupiers;” the counter-argument was that MNF would leave when Maliki ordered them to - the Iranians would not. The objective was a cessation of violence between MNF and his members if they undertook to: support the political process and development in Basra; oppose Iranian influence - especially the Iranian backed JAM Special Groups; and, on meeting those conditions, gain release from detention. It was not the intent that MNF operations should in any way be circumscribed by, or beholden to, the interests of the JAM interlocutor. Any concessions made were on strict conditionality that he delivered his side of the bargain; otherwise, his group would be subject to MNF action as before. The package was negotiated by MND(SE), agreed by GoI representatives including Mohan, authorised by the US chain of command, and cleared through the UK Government. It was agreed in mid-August 2007.

It was understood that some sort of confrontation with JAM was inevitable. However, it would necessarily be led by Mohan and done in an Iraqi way - an Iraqi solution to an Iraqi problem. Mohan realised the ISF in Basra were not yet ready for a violent confrontation. He needed to shape the political terrain by garnering support and cutting deals. As well as increasing his leverage, this would also buy time for him to build up the competence and confidence of his forces to ready them for the expected confrontation.¹³⁸ This provided the newly-arrived

¹³⁸ Mohan faced a dilemma: his troops were simply not ready, nor were the political conditions propitious, for a direct confrontation with the militias. There was a clear risk here that the longer Mohan took to ready his force, the greater the chance that Basra might slip further into lawlessness and – as some believe happened – to fall under the sway of the militias, who might also be using the pause to consolidate. This would be exacerbated if Mohan’s political manoeuvring failed to deliver the desired results. Failure to control the security situation could result in reputational damage to British Forces as well as to the ISF. The British vacated the Basra City bases in September 2007 and handed over formal responsibility for security in Basra to Mohan under the auspices of Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) in December 2007, thereby moving

1Mechanised Brigade with a clear operational focus: training and mentoring the ISF. Mohan set a target date of the promised but unscheduled provincial elections. A further factor influenced the timing of any confrontation: Baghdad politics. Maliki was in a relatively weak position in mid-2007, facing an existential threat to his rule in Baghdad from Sunni and AQ-I extremists, as well as having to manage dissent in within the Shia polity. *The Surge* started to take effect in summer 2007 with efforts concentrated on Baghdad and the Sunni “belts” girdling it. Given the intensity of the struggle in Baghdad, opening a “second front” in Basra was to be avoided.¹³⁹

Only Iraqis could resolve issues of Shia identity and loyalty; therefore MND(SE)’s intent was to support Mohan, but the denouement remains controversial. By early 2008, Mohan, with British planning advice, was preparing an operation to confront JAM with a target start date of sometime that summer. However, the operation was not to proceed as planned. Buoyed up with the success achieved in Baghdad since the previous summer, Maliki was now more secure politically and better placed to deal with Basra. Rather than endorse Mohan’s more deliberate approach, Maliki acted impetuously launching the operation ahead of schedule, before the ISF

into “Operational Overwatch.” General Mohan had primacy for security and technically, the British no longer had de jure responsibility although in the eyes of many they retained de facto moral responsibility and were judged culpable by some for the violence of 2008. At least one senior American general went further claiming Britain had been “defeated” in Basra: “Britain suffered defeat in Basra, says US general” [Jack Keane] BBC News website, posted 29 September 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-11419878> (Accessed 9 Feb 12).

¹³⁹ Significant sectarian violence was causing grievous loss of life in Baghdad. Vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VB-IEDs) were routinely causing carnage in market places and other public spaces, generating extreme fear, anger and frustration on the part of the civilian populace, both Sunni and Shia. Reported graphically in the world’s media, the dramatic images of the dead and injured conveyed a powerful message that Iraq was a country on the verge of collapse. Maliki’s government was under extreme pressure. Opening a second front on the flank in Basra could only compound this. Politically, it seemed imperative that the region was quiescent; and militarily Basra was contained in an economy of force operation. Having to redeploy forces from the north to respond to an upsurge of violence in the south would have been an extremely unhelpful distraction from the main effort of providing security to Baghdad as *The Surge* got under way in earnest from the summer of 2007 onwards. In fact, JAM was described in a MNC-I operations order as a “minor irritant,” which put threat of JAM into perspective when compared to the Sunni AQ-I challenge.

was fully prepared. This took everyone, including General Petraeus, by surprise¹⁴⁰. Maliki came to Basra to oversee the operation in person. Incoherent and uncoordinated, the offensive, known as *Charge of the Knights*, started badly and JAM fought the ISF to a standstill.

Maliki called for assistance. Subject to political constraints, the British response was circumspect - judged inadequate by some. Not surprisingly, given the predicament of Maliki, the US bailed him out. The ISF, with the Prime Minister of Iraq at its head, simply could not be allowed to fail in a trial of strength with JAM. US intervention stabilised the situation, allowing the ISF to regroup. Subsequently, with MNC-I support, the ISF gained control of Basra and appeared to defeat JAM who ceded the streets to them.¹⁴¹ Some hailed this as a significant triumph for the ISF; they had ostensibly - albeit with MNC-I support - defeated JAM in a toe-to-toe fight. The reality may be more complex, more ambiguous and more Iraqi in nature. According to open-source reporting, the “defeat” of JAM (its withdrawal from the streets) appears to have occurred not as a result of a decisive tactical battle. It happened - according to US commentators, Linda Robinson and Bing West - as a consequence of a secret flight into Iran by Iraqi politicians to confer with senior commanders of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Command (IRGC) Qods Force and broker a deal.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ General Petraeus, interview with the BBC for a documentary: “Secret Iraq” Part 2, first screened in October 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00v2qyt> (Accessed 9 Feb 2012).

¹⁴¹ With greater freedom for manoeuvre than in 2007, given improved security in Baghdad, US forces were rushed to Basra. Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) assets and significant fire support capabilities were directed by a rapidly deployed, forward-based US HQ.

¹⁴² Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*, (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2008), Page 341. “After two days fighting....a delegation of Iraqi legislators from the Dawa and ISCI parties went to the Iranian city of Qom to negotiate a ceasefire with Sadr, with the help from the Iranian Qods force commander.” Bing West, *The Strongest Tribe*, (New York, NY: Random House, 2009), Page 353 “Iraqi politicians flew to Iran to negotiate a face saving exit for Maliki. With advice from the Iranians who were training and equipping special groups of JAM to kill Americans, Sadr ordered his troops to stop fighting and disperse.”

Therefore, when the ISF conducted its apparently triumphant attack they were actually occupying ground deliberately ceded to them because of the Iranian intervention. However, this should not be viewed negatively. Although it started precipitately, with incomplete planning and poor execution, *Charge of the Knights* eventually succeeded. JAM's hold on the streets of Basra ended and the writ of the GoI was extended in its place. Achievement of security opened the way for development and prosperity, which promised to improve the lives of ordinary Baswaris. Whilst its detailed conduct could not have been predicted, it is exactly the type of action envisaged by the *Mohan Plan* supported by MND(SE) in summer 2007.¹⁴³ It was, as it could only have been, an idiosyncratically-Iraqi solution to an Iraqi political problem.

It was not just the British who chose to "accommodate" Shia militias to help the Iraqis resolve their complex political problems. Significantly, the US also accommodated JAM tactically, whilst continuing to conduct strike operations against the Iranian-sponsored *Special Groups*.¹⁴⁴ Bing West's commentary indicates the limits of military force and the uncomfortable, pragmatic choices sometimes required.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³In an attempt to draw a line under the controversy over *Charge of the Knights*, it is worth noting who had primacy of responsibility for security in Basra in 2008. Some commentators have accused MND(SE) - specifically the British forces - of abandoning Baswaris to the rule of the militias in September 2007. However, the British re-posturing from Basra City was conducted as a relief in place whereby British forces handed over control for security to Iraqi forces and this saw British and Iraqi units occupying the same bases, side by side, sometimes for an extended period of time, to ensure an orderly transition. The operation supported the intent of General Mohan, who felt the British presence in the city was destabilising as he prepared the way for an accommodation or confrontation with the militias. Importantly, the GoI in the person of Mohan, thus had de facto primacy for security in Basra in the summer of 2007; this was translated into de jure authority in December 2007 with the granting of Provincial Iraqi Control status to Basra.

¹⁴⁴Bing West, *The Strongest Tribe*, (New York, NY: Random House, 2009), Page 302. West describes the operations of a US battalion in Kadhimiyyah (the site of a major Shiite shrine) at the end of 2007 as an illustration of a "cancerous growth of Shia militias, which by fall 2007 presented more of a danger in Baghdad than did the languishing AQ cells." West notes that the battalion commander "had received no plan for systematically dismantling the [Shiite] militias that surrounded him...because their leaders included the leaders of the sovereign state of Iraq. Maliki let the Americans take the brunt of hunting down the worst of the JAM, whilst he held back the Iraqi Army. Petraeus and Crocker were

CONCLUSION

This monograph set out to examine the continued utility of military force as an instrument of policy in the complex contemporary operating environment, the ambiguity of which is exemplified by the experience of Basra cited above. The events in Basra graphically illustrate just how difficult it is to understand, let alone to manipulate or influence with armed force, indigenous political dynamics. More widely, ten years of protracted stabilisation/COIN campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan have cost much in blood, treasure and political capital but the gains have been niggardly, very slow to materialise and scarcely commensurate with the investment. Strategic impatience and frustration is evident. There is skepticism about the efficacy of foreign interventions.¹⁴⁶ This monograph's observations about transition and transformation; and reconciliation and re-integration highlight the challenges of translating military advantage into political success in stabilisation operations. Chastened, the mood in several Western capitals seems increasingly wary of further stabilisation campaigns abroad. This sense of caution is reinforced by the global economic downturn and its associated fiscal challenges, which have encouraged retrenchment in public spending, especially in defence budgets.

hobbled...The Americans... weren't allowed within 600 metres of the shrine or other mosques which became sanctuaries for JAM leaders."

¹⁴⁵ Bing West *The Strongest Tribe*, (New York, NY: Random House, 2009), Page 275. "The Americans did not establish combat outposts in Shiite neighbourhoods with orders to protect the population from the JAM. That would have provoked a larger war and *The Surge* force didn't have the numbers to protect the Shiite population."

¹⁴⁶ Some experts have raised the issue of the "paradox of intervention." This refers to the circumstances where an intervention was judged to gain international legitimacy, permitting it to be launched, only when it was too late for it to be effective. The point at which humanitarian imperatives are so egregious that they trump the sovereignty issues resisting an external intervention, is generally past the time when such an intervention might have been early enough to treat successfully the causes of the problem.. UK MOD Future Character of Conflict Deductions Process, Summer 2010, quoted in UK MOD Strategic Defence and Security Review Deterrence Study 20101019 – U.

However, the apparent success of the NATO campaign in Libya, dominated by air operations, is alluring. It seems not only to have achieved its political objectives, but also to have done so cost effectively and - importantly - within a timeframe that is politically tolerable for western domestic electorates. Indeed, some see the Libya as the exemplar for future intervention operations. Furthermore, the results of ongoing US RPA strikes in Yemen and Pakistan may encourage political decision makers to favour such limited footprint methods of military intervention. Achieving military and political effect through remotely delivered weapons has an obvious attraction over *boots on the ground*.

Following Clausewitz's reasoning, the utility of force rests on its instrumentality in achieving a desired policy goal. The political value of armed force derives ultimately from its power to hurt (its capacity for "killing people and breaking things") and is a function of how effectively this can be harnessed to influence behavior and achieve control. In stabilisation/COIN campaigns, where political considerations predominate, the sharp edge of force is blunted and Clausewitz's visceral "elemental fury" of war consciously held in check. In a confrontation with an enemy operating amongst the people, the power to hurt is diffused and attenuated, being consciously restrained by policy choices and by legal and moral norms; a greater premium is placed on persuasion over coercion. Here, other instruments of power are more influential and armed force has, of necessity, a subordinate role. By promoting physical security, it can create the opportunity for other instruments of power to resolve political problems; but armed force alone may solve little. It is a crude instrument that may need to be wielded with sophisticated judgment if its effects are to be exploited to deliver, or to facilitate, the desired political outcome. It with must be underwritten with the requisite political commitment and integrated with other tools of statecraft in a *Whole of Government* approach, where ends, ways and means are properly aligned. Perhaps President John F Kennedy expressed this most eloquently:

"You [military professionals] must know something about strategy and tactics and logistics, but also economics and politics and diplomacy and history.

You must know everything you can know about military power, and you must also understand the limits of military power. You must understand that few of the important problems of our time have, in the final analysis, been finally solved by military power alone.”¹⁴⁷

History provides many examples where force has enabled key strategic issues to be decided.¹⁴⁸ However, whilst force is a powerful instrument of decision, it does not always lead to the desired outcome. Gray observes there is no guarantee that military success will automatically lead to the realisation of our political goals, saying there is “an uncertain exchange rate between military effort and political effect.”¹⁴⁹ Thus, the value of force as a policy tool is limited not only when it fails to fulfill its normative function, but it is also an imperfect instrument even when it does function normatively. The outcome of the application of force is often uncertain and the law of unintended consequences has free rein.

Imposing our will and realising a political end-state involves shaping or controlling the adversary’s policy choices. It does not necessarily require the complete subjugation of the enemy, but only the achievement of a degree of control sufficient to ensure he conforms to our wishes. It is a function of changing attitudes, and thence behaviour, in a way favourable to our interests. It requires our opponents to embrace our vision of their political future; they must be convinced to accept this changed political order - “after vincere comes convincere.” In conventional inter-state war this has traditionally been done at a peace conference. In anything short of complete

¹⁴⁷ President John F. Kennedy (remarks to the graduating class of the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, 7 June 1961).

¹⁴⁸ Colin S Gray, “Defining and Achieving Decisive Victory,” Strategic Studies Institute Monograph, Carlisle PA, April 2002, Page 7. Gray lists examples where war has produced a decision; amongst others, these are: the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Cold War. Elaborating, he observes that the Second World War decided that the Nazi adventure in racial hegemony would come to an abrupt end; the Korean War decided that forcible unification of the peninsula was not achievable at bearable cost to either side; the US war in Vietnam (1965 – 73) decided that South Vietnam would not sustain itself as an independent polity.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., Page 17.

destruction, the enemy must cooperate to some degree for the threat or use of force to be effective in realising a political end-state: he must choose, albeit under duress, to be coerced into acquiescence. The defeated government is responsible for controlling its people and ensuring they abide by the provisions of the settlement. In an intervention where control of the people is contested, the imposition of the victor's will is more complex.¹⁵⁰ Force is less useful here since it cannot indoctrinate, inspire or implant an ideology that will lead to an enduring change of attitudes that translates into political success.

In considering the utility of force, it is noteworthy that of the three essential requirements Howard stipulates for war to be decisive, only one is a military responsibility. The rest fall to other instruments of statecraft whose relative importance is accentuated in COIN where political, economic and diplomatic factors predominate. Here, success depends heavily on legitimacy-enhancing stabilisation activity, which may take considerable time to bear fruit. The military contributes by providing physical security to enable the freedom of action of civilian agencies and by protecting the people. Furthermore, it develops indigenous force capability through training and partnering, thereby promoting transition. Arguably, it should also develop a rudimentary stabilisation capability to “hold the ring” until the situation is sufficiently permissive for the expert civil agencies to operate. Military effect bears most on conflict termination, but this is

¹⁵⁰ Evan Luard, *The Blunted Sword*, (London: Tauris and Co Ltd, 1989), Page 18. Writing in 1989 against the background of the waning Cold War, Evan Luard notes the paradox that in a variety of “proxy wars” the overwhelming military power of the superpowers was unusable – or not easily exploitable to its full potential; his observations resonate today: “Political objectives can only be achieved by political means....it is not, therefore, bigger armies and more powerful and sophisticated weapons which secure success but more effective influence. It is better powers of persuasion, not military power, which states most require to secure their ends in the modern international political system...Military success is itself dependent on the capacity to secure the support of local populations...Power stems ultimately from the thoughts, beliefs and loyalties of ordinary people. The capacity to win widespread political support, therefore, is vital not only to political but also to military success... military victory (even if it can be won) cannot easily secure these goals [political control over the population]. Those outcomes can be achieved only if the population in the territory concerned; or at least the more influential sections of it, can be persuaded to share their [the government / intervening power] views concerning the way they should be governed.”

subordinate to conflict resolution, which is the truly decisive element since it addresses the root causes of the conflict. Only success here will produce a lasting and stable settlement, cementing the realisation of our policy goals.¹⁵¹

Military force is optimised for “killing people and breaking things,” legitimately, in the service of the state. This renders it eminently suited to deter, compel and coerce, particularly in the context of inter-state relations where the focus of these effects is the opposing government. Force is arguably less effective and demands a more sophisticated application in asymmetric conflict against non-state actors, where there is no government or readily accessible conventional fielded forces, fixed assets, or leadership that can be subjected to attack, or to the threat of attack. Accordingly, some terrorist groups have tried to mitigate the technological military superiority of the West by operating in failed states and ungoverned space. However, the US policy of using RPAs to target individuals deemed responsible for terrorist activity is a notable development, which seems to have restored the behaviour-punishment link that is fundamental to effective coercion. Holding individuals, rather than states, accountable enables the exaction of retribution. The will and the capability to conduct such precision strikes at distance generates considerable psychological leverage over the behaviour of those targeted. It is difficult to make firm judgments without access to classified intelligence analysis but anecdotal evidence suggests that these strikes

¹⁵¹ Beatrice Heuser in *Clausewitz and the Twenty First Century*, edited by Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Pages 161 – 162. Perhaps Heuser captures this best when answering her rhetorical question: “What according to our reading of Clausewitz and in the light of European History, are the conditions of a victory that leads to a lasting peace[?] A decisive battle may, or may not, be required. A decisive military defeat of the enemy certainly was a major precondition for breaking the enemy’s will to resist, but on its own it was rarely a sufficient precondition for lasting peace. A crushing defeat could prepare the ground for a thorough re-structuring of the enemy’s culture and beliefs, as in Germany and Japan in 1945. But without the latter, the former did not necessarily guarantee a lasting effect...A long term victory that leads to a robust peace must change the enemy’s mind and not just his will. It must convince him, not just temporarily disable him. It must win over the heart of the enemy so that his population is no longer hostile.”

are inflicting considerable pain, constraining freedom of manoeuvre and may be deterring further terrorist attacks against US interests.¹⁵²

Despite the doubts generated by the experience of Iraq and Afghanistan, military force retains utility and efficacy in the complex contemporary operating context, as demonstrated by the success of the NATO campaign in Libya. However, the missions allocated to the military must be appropriate and adequately resourced, and properly integrated with other instruments of power; otherwise, success will prove elusive.¹⁵³ Policy must not ask too much of force; its limitations - specifically, what can and cannot be achieved by *killing people and breaking things* - must be firmly understood and accommodated. Critically, this demands a sophisticated understanding of the context in which military force is to be deployed or employed, including an appreciation of the timeframe within which the desired results may be delivered.¹⁵⁴ It is, to repeat the words of General Petraeus, “all about the politics.”

¹⁵²Jane Perlez and Pir Zubair Shah, “Drones Batter Al Qaeda and its Allies within Pakistan,” *New York Times*, 4 April 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/05/world/asia/05drones.html> (Accessed 9 Feb 12). “Flight of the Drones”, *The Economist*, 8 October 2011. <http://www.economist.com/node/21531433> (Accessed 9 Feb 12).

¹⁵³Andrew Gilligan, “The Lessons of Basra are: do something properly or don’t do it at all.” <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23683477-the-lessons-of-basra-are-do-something-properly-or-not-at-all.do> (Accessed 9 Feb 12). Robert Fox, “This was a shambolic misadventure and we must learn from it,” *London Evening Standard*, 30 April 2009. <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23683620-this-was-a-shambolic-misadventure-and-we-must-learn-from-it.do> (Accessed 9 Feb 12).

¹⁵⁴Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds. and trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), Pages 88-89. Clausewitz comments trenchantly: “The first, the supreme, the most far – reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.”

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